

THE
WORKS
OF
LAURENCE STERNE.

IN TEN VOLUMES COMPLETE.

CONTAINING,

I. THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF TRISTRAM
SHANDY, GENT.

II. A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY THROUGH
FRANCE AND ITALY.

III. SERMONS. ——— IV. LETTERS.

WITH
A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

VOLUME THE EIGHTH.

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LAURENCE STERN

IN THE YEAR 1608

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S E R M O N S

BY

LAURENCE STERNE, A.M.

PREBENDARY OF YORK,
AND VICAR OF SUTTON ON THE FOREST
AND OF STILLINGTON NEAR YORK.

S E R M O N S

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A 2

C O N T E N T S.

SERMON XXX. p. 1. Description of the World.

2 PETER III. 11.

Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved,—
what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy
conversation and godliness? looking and hastening
unto the coming of God.

SERMON XXXI. p. 17. St. Peter's Character.

ACTS III. 12.

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people,
Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look
ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or
holiness we had made this man to walk?

SERMON XXXII. p. 41. Thirtieth of January.

EZRA IX. 6, 7.

And I said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift
up my face to thee, my God:—for our iniquities are
increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up
unto the heavens.—Since the days of our fathers
have we been in a great trespass unto this day.

CONTENTS.

SERMON XXXIII. p. 59.

ROMANS II. 4.

Despiseſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and forbearance, and long ſuffering—knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth thee to repentance?

ECCLESIASTES VIII. II.

Be cauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil—

SERMON XXXIV. p. 77.

Trust in God.

PSALM XXXVII. 3.

Put thou thy truſt in the Lord.—

SERMON XXXV. p. 95.

EXODUS XXI. 14.

But if a man come preſumptuouſly upon his neighbour, to ſlay him with guile;—thou ſhalt take him from my altar, that he may die.

SERMON XXXVI. p. 111.

Sanctity of the Apoſtles.

MATTHEW XI. 6.

Bleſſed is he, that ſhall not be offended in me.

SERMON XXXVII. p. 125.

Penances.

1 JOHN V. 3.

And his commandments are not grievous.

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N XXXVIII. p. 145.

On Enthusiasm.

ST. JOHN XV. 5.

—For without me, ye can do nothing.

S E R M O N XXXIX. p. 167.

Eternal Advantages of Religion.

ECCLESIASTES XII. 13.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter,—Fear
God, and keep his commandments: for this is the
whole duty of man.

S E R M O N XL. p. 181.

Afa: a Thanksgiving Sermon.

2 CHRONICLES XV. 14.

And they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and
with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets.—
And all the men of Judah rejoiced at the oath.

S E R M O N XLI. p. 199.

Follow Peace.

HEBREWS XII. 14.

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which
no man shall see the Lord.

S E R M O N XLII. p. 213.

Search the Scriptures.

ST. JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N XLIII. p. 231.

PSALM XCV. 6, 7.

O come let us worship and fall down before him:—
for he is the Lord our God.——

S E R M O N XLIV. p. 249.

The Ways of Providence justified to
Man.

PSALM LXXIII. 12, 13.

Behold these are the ungodly who prosper in the world,
they increafe in riches.

Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my
hands in innocency.

S E R M O N XLV. p. 267.

The Ingratitude of Israel.

2 KINGS XVII. 7.

For so it was,—that the children of Israel had sinned
against the Lord their God, who had brought them up
out of the land of Egypt.—

SERMON XXX.

Description of the World.

2 PETER III. II.

Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved,—
what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? looking and hastening unto the coming of God.

THE subject upon which St. Peter is discoursing in this chapter, is the certainty of Christ's coming to judge the world;—and the words of the text are the moral application he draws from the representation he gives of it,—in which, in answer to the cavils of the scoffers in the latter days, concerning the delay of his coming, he tells them, that God is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness, but is long suffering to us ward;—*that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a*

great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.

—Seeing then, says he, all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?—The inference is unavoidable,—at least in theory, however it fails in practice;—how widely these two differ, I intend to make the subject of this discourse; and though it is a melancholy comparison, to consider, ‘what manner of persons we *really* are,’ with ‘what manner of persons we *ought* to be,’ yet as the knowledge of the one is at least one step towards the improvement in the other,—the parallel will not be thought to want its use.

Give me leave, therefore, in the first place, to recal to your observations, what kind of world it is we live in, and what manner of persons we really are.

Secondly, and in opposition to this, I shall make use of the apostle’s argument, and, from a brief representation of the Christian religion, and the obli-

gations it lays upon us, shew, what manner of persons we *ought* to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.

Whoever takes a view of the world, will, I fear, be able to discern but very faint marks of this character, either upon the looks or actions of its inhabitants.—Of all the ends and pursuits we are looking for, and hastening unto,—this would be the least suspected,—for, without running into that old declamatory cant upon the wickedness of the age,—we may say within the bounds of truth,—that there is as little influence from this principle which the apostle lays stress on, and as little sense of religion,—as small a share of virtue (at least as little of the appearance of it) as can be supposed to exist at all in a country where it is countenanced by the state.—The degeneracy of the times has been the common complaint of many ages :—how much we exceed our forefathers in this, is known alone to that God who trieth

the hearts.—But this we may be allowed to urge in their favour, they studied at least to preserve the appearance of virtue ;—public vice was branded with public infamy, and obliged to hide its head in privacy and retirement. The service of God was regularly attended, and religion not exposed to the reproaches of the s corner.

How the case stands with us at present in each of these particulars, it is grievous to report, and perhaps unacceptable to religion herself ; yet as this is a season wherein it is fit we should be told of our faults, let us for a moment impartially consider the articles of this charge.

And first, concerning the great article of religion, and the influence it has at present upon the lives and behaviour of the present times ;—concerning which I have said, that, if we are to trust appearances, there is as little as can well be supposed to exist at all in a Christian country. Here I shall spare exclamations, and, avoiding all common-place railing upon the subject, confine myself

to facts, such as every one who looks into the world, and makes any observations at all, will vouch for me.

Now whatever are the degrees of real religion amongst us,—whatever they are, the appearances are strong against the charitable side of the question.—

If religion is any where to be found, one would think it would be amongst those of the higher rank in life, whose education, and opportunities of knowing its great importance, should have brought them over to its interest, and rendered them as firm in the defence of it, as eminent in its example.—But if you examine the fact, you will almost find it a test of a politer education, and mark of more shining parts, to know nothing, and, indeed, care nothing at all about it:—or, if the subject happens to engage the attention of a few of the more sprightly wits,—that it serves no other purpose, but that of being made merry at, and of being reserved as a standing jest, to enliven discourse, when conversation sickens upon their hands.—

This is too soon an evil not to be observed amongst persons of all ages, in what is called higher life; and so early does the contempt of this great concern begin to shew itself—that it is no uncommon thing to hear persons disputing against religion, and raising cavils against the Bible, at an age when some of them would be hard set to read a chapter in it.—And I may add, of those whose stock in knowledge is somewhat larger, that for the most part it has scarce any other foundation to rest on but the sinking credit of traditional and second-hand objections against revelation, which, had they leisure to read, they would find answered and confuted a thousand times over.—But this by the way.—

If we take a view of the public worship of Almighty God, and observe in what manner it is revered by persons in this rank of life, whose duty it is to set an example to the poor and ignorant, we shall find concurring evidence upon this melancholy argument—of a general want of all outward demonstration of a

sense of our duty towards God, as if religion was a business fit only to employ tradesmen and mechanics—and the salvation of our souls, a concern utterly below the consideration of a person of figure and consequence.—

I shall say nothing at present of the lower ranks of mankind—though they have not yet got into the fashion of laughing at religion, and treating it with scorn and contempt, and I believe are too serious a set of creatures ever to come into it; yet we are not to imagine but that the contempt it is held in by those whose examples they are apt to imitate, will in time utterly shake their principles, and render them, if not as prophane, at least as corrupt as their betters.—When this event happens—and we begin to *feel* the effects of it in our dealings with them, those who have done the mischief will find the necessity at last of turning religious in their own defence, and, for want of a better principle, to set an example of piety and good morals for their own interest and convenience.

Thus much for the languishing state of religion in the present age ;—in virtue and good morals perhaps the account may stand higher.—

Let us inquire—

And here, I acknowledge, that an unexperienced man, who heard how loudly we all talked in behalf of virtue and moral honesty, and how unanimous we were all in our cry against vicious characters of all denominations, would be apt hastily to conclude, that the whole world was in an uproar about it—and that there was so general a horror and detestation of vice amongst us, that mankind were all associating together to hunt it out of the world, and give it no quarter.—This I own would be a natural conclusion for any one who only trusted his ears upon this subject.—But as matter of fact is allowed better evidence than hear-say—let us see in the present how the one case is contradicted by the other.—

However vehement we approve ourselves in discourse against vice—I believe no one is ignorant that the reception it

actually meets with is very different—the conduct and behaviour of the world is so opposite to their language, and all we hear so contradicted by what we see, as to leave little room to question which sense we are to trust.—

Look, I beseech you, amongst those whose higher stations are made a shelter for the liberties they take, you will see, that no man's character is so infamous, nor any woman's so abandoned, as not to be visited and admitted freely into all companies, and if the party can pay for it, even publicly to be courted, caressed, and flattered.—If this will not overthrow the credit of our virtue,—take a short view of the general decay of it, from the fashionable excesses of the age,—in favour of which there seems to be formed so strong a party, that a man of sobriety, temperance, and regularity, scarce knows how to accommodate himself to the society he lives in,—and is oft as much at a loss how and where to dispose of himself;—and unless you suppose a mixture of constancy in his

temper, it is great odds but such a one would be ridiculed, and laughed out of his scruples and his virtue at the same time;—to say nothing of occasional rioting, chambering, and wantonness. —Consider how many public markets are established merely for the sale of virtue,—where the manner of going, too sadly indicates the intention;—and the disguise each is under, not only gives power safely to drive on the bargain, but too often tempts to carry it into execution too.—

The sinning under disguise, I own, seems to carry some appearance of a secret homage to virtue and decorum, and might be acknowledged as such, was it not the only public instance the world seems to give of it. In other cases, a just sense of shame seems a matter of so little concern, that instead of any regularity of behaviour, you see thousands who are tired with the very form of it, and who at length have even thrown the mask of it aside, as a useless piece of incumbrance.—This I

believe will need no evidence, it is too evidently seen in the open liberties taken every day, in defiance (not to say of religion, but) of decency and common good manners;—so that it is no uncommon thing to behold vices which heretofore were committed only in dark corners, now openly shew their face in broad day, and oft-times with such an air of triumph, as if the party thought he was doing himself honour,—or that he thought the deluding an unhappy creature, and the keeping her in a state of guilt, was as necessary a piece of grandeur as the keeping an equipage,—and did him as much credit as any other appendage of his fortune.

If we pass on from the vices to the indecorums of the age (which is a softer name for vices), you will scarce see any thing, in what is called higher life, but what bespeaks a general relaxation of all order and discipline, in which our opinions as well as manners seem to be set loose from all restraints;—and in truth, from all serious reflections too:—and one may venture to say, that gaming

and extravagance, to the utter ruin of the greatest estates,—minds dissipated with diversions, and heads giddy with a perpetual rotation of them, are the most general characters to be met with; and though one would expect, that at least the more solemn seasons of the year, set apart for the contemplation of Christ's sufferings, should give some check and interruption to them, yet what appearance is there ever amongst us, that it is so;—what one alteration does it make in the course of things? Is not the doctrine of mortification insulted by the same luxury of entertainments at our tables?—is not the same order of diversions perpetually returning, and scarce any thing else thought of?—does not the same levity in dress, as well as discourse, shew itself in persons of all ages? I say of all ages, for it is no small aggravation of the corruption of our morals, that age, which by its authority was once able to frown youth into sobriety and better manners, and keep them within bounds, seems but too often to lead the way,—and by

their unseasonable example give a countenance to follies and weakness, which youth is but too apt to run into without such a recommendation.—Surely age,—which is but one remove from death, should have nothing about it, but what looks like a decent preparation for it.—In purer times it was the case,—but now,—grey hairs themselves scarce ever appear, but in the high mode and flaunting garb of youth,—with heads as full of pleasure, and clothes as ridiculously, and as much in the fashion, as the person who wears them is usually grown out of it:—upon which article give me leave to make a short reflection; which is this, that whenever the eldest equal the youngest in the vanity of their dress, there is no reason to be given for it, but that they equal them, if not surpass them, in the vanity of their desires.—

But this by the bye.—

Though in truth the observation falls in with the main intention of this discourse,—which is not framed to flatter our follies, or touch them with a light

hand, but plainly to point them out; that by recalling to your mind, what manner of persons we really are, I might better lead you to the apostle's inference, of what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of God.—

The apostle, in the concluding verse of this argument, exhorts, that they who look for such things be diligent, that they be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless;—and one may conclude with him, that if the hopes or fears, either the reason or the passions of men are to be wrought upon at all, it must be from the force and influence of this awakening consideration in the text:—"That all these things shall be dissolved:"—that this vain and perishable scene must change, that we who now tread the stage, must shortly be summoned away;—that we are creatures but of a day, hastening unto the place from whence we shall return no more;—that whilst we are here, —our conduct and behaviour is minute-

ly observed;—that there is a Being about our paths and about our beds, whose omniscient eye spies out all our ways, and takes a faithful record of all the passages of our lives;—that these volumes shall be produced and opened, and men shall be judged out of the things that are written in them;—that without respect of persons, we shall be made accountable for our thoughts, our words and actions, to this greatest and best of Beings, before whose judgment-seat we must finally appear, and receive the things done in the body, whether they are good, or whether they are bad.—

That to add to the terror of it,—this day of the Lord will come upon us like a thief in the night;—of that hour no one knoweth;—that we are not sure of its being suspended one day or one hour; or, what is the same case,—that we are standing upon the edge of a precipice, with nothing but the single thread of human life to hold us up;—and that if we fall unprepared in this thoughtless state, we are lost, and must perish for evermore.—

What manner of persons we ought to be, upon these principles of our religion, St. Peter has told us, in all holy conversation and godliness;—and I shall only remind, how different a frame of mind, the looking for, and hastening unto the coming of God, under such a life, is, from that of spending our days in vanity, and our years in pleasure.—

Give me leave, therefore, to conclude in that merciful warning, which our SAVIOUR, the Judge himself, hath given us, at the close of the same exhortation.—

Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be over-charged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life;—and so that day come upon you unawares;—for as a snare shall it come upon all that dwell on the face of the whole earth.—Watch therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. Which may God of his mercy grant, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXI.

St. Peter's Character.

ACTS III. 12.

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people,
Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look
ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or
holiness we had made this man to walk?

TH E S E words, as the text tells us, were
spoke by St. Peter, on the occasion
of his miraculous cure of the lame man,
who was laid at the gate of the temple,
and, in the beginning of this chapter,
had asked an alms of St. Peter and St.
John, as they went up together at the
hour of prayer;—on whom St. Peter
fastening his eyes, as in the 4th verse,
and declaring he had no such relief to
give him as he expected, having neither
silver nor gold,—but that such as he
had, the benefit of that divine power
which he had received from his Master,

he would impart to him,—he commands him forthwith, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to rise up and walk.—And he took him by the hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength; and he leaped up, stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, leaping and praising God.—

It seems he had been born lame, had passed a whole life of despair, without hopes of ever being restored;—so that the immediate sense of strength and activity communicated to him at once, in so surprising and unsought-for a manner, cast him into the transport of mind natural to a man so benefited beyond his expectation.—So that the amazing instance of a supernatural power;—the notoriety of fact, wrought at the hour of prayer;—the unexceptionableness of the object,—that it was no imposture,—for they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple;—the unfeigned expressions of an enraptured heart almost beside itself,

confirming the whole;—the man that was healed, in the 10th verse, holding his benefactors, Peter and John, entering into the temple with them, walking and leaping, and praising God;—the great concourse of people, drawn together by this event, in the 11th verse, for they all ran unto them, into the porch that was called Solomon's, greatly wondering. Sure never was such a fair opportunity for an ambitious mind to have established a character of superior goodness and power.—To a man set upon this world, who sought his own praise and honour, what an invitation would it have been to have turned these circumstances to such a purpose;—to have fallen in with the passions of an astonished and grateful city, prepossessed, from what had happened, so strongly in his favour already, that little art or management was requisite to have improved their wonder and good opinion into the highest reverence of his sanctity, awe of his person, or whatever other belief should be necessary to feed his pride,

or serve secret ends of glory and interest.—A mind not sufficiently mortified to the world, might have been tempted here to have taken the honour due to God—and transferred it to himself.—He might—not so—a disciple of Christ: for when Peter saw it,—when he saw the propensity in them to be misled on this occasion,—he answered and said unto the people, in the words of the text,—Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look you so earnestly on us, as though by our own power and holiness we had made this man to walk?—The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his son Jesus.—

O holy, and blessed apostle!

How would thy meek and mortified spirit satisfy itself in uttering so humble and so just a declaration?—What an honest triumph wouldst thou taste the sweets of,—in thus conquering thy passion of vain glory,—keeping down thy pride,—disclaiming the praises which should have fed it, by telling the won-

dering spectators, It was not thy own power,—it was not thy own holiness, which had wrought this—thou being of like passions and infirmities;—but that it was the power of the God of Abraham,—the holiness of thy dear Lord, whom they crucified, operating by faith through thee, who wast but an instrument in his hands.—If thus honestly declining honour, which the occasion so amply invited thee to take;—if this would give more satisfaction to a mind like thine, than the loudest praises of a mistaken people, what true rapture would be added to it from the reflection—that in this instance of self-denial—thou hadst not only done well,—but, what was still a more endearing thought, that thou hadst been able to copy the example of thy divine Master, who, in no action of his life, sought ever his own praise, but, on the contrary, declined all possible occasions of it;—and in the only public instance of honour which he suffered to be given him in his entrance into Jerusalem,—thou didst

remember,—it was accepted with such a mixture of humility, that the prediction of the prophet was not more exactly fulfilled in the hosannas of the multitude, than in the meekness wherewith he received them, lowly and sitting upon an ass.—How could a disciple fail of profiting by the example of so humble a master, whose whole course of life was a particular lecture to this virtue, and, in every instance of it, shewed plainly he came not to share the pride and glories of life, or gratify the carnal expectation of ambitious followers; which, had he affected external pomp, he might have accomplished, by engrossing, as he could have done by a word, all the riches of the world; and by the splendour of his court, and dignity of his person, had been greater than Solomon in all his glory, and have attracted the applause and admiration of the world:—this every disciple knew was in his power;—so that the meanness of his birth,—the toils and poverty of his life,—the low offices in which he was

engaged, by preaching the gospel to the poor—the numberless dangers and inconveniencies attending the execution,—were all voluntary.—This humble choice both of friends and family out of the meanest of the people,—amongst whom he appeared rather as a servant than a master, coming not, as he often told them, to be ministered unto, but to minister,—and as the prophet had foretold in that mournful description of him, having no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty that we should desire him.—

How could a disciple, you'll say, reflect without benefit on this amiable character, with all the other tender pathetic proofs of humility, which his memory would suggest had happened of a piece with it, in the course of his master's life;—but particularly at the conclusion and great catastrophe of it, —at his crucifixion; the impressions of which could never be forgotten.—When a life full of so many engaging instances of humility, was crowned with the most endearing one of humbling himself to the death of the cross,—the

death of a slave and a malefactor,—suffering himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter,—dragged to Calvary without opposition or complaint, and as a sheep before his shearer is dumb, opening not his mouth.—

O blessed Jesus! well might a disciple of thine learn of thee to be meek and lowly of heart, as thou exhortedst them all, for thou wast meek and lowly:—well might they profit, when such a lesson was seconded by such an example!—It is not to be doubted what force this must have had on the actions of those who were attendants and constant followers of our Saviour on earth;—saw the meekness of his temper in the occurrences of his life, and the amazing proof of it at his death, who, though he was able to call down legions of angels to his rescue, or by a single act of omnipotence to have destroyed his enemies; yet suppressed his almighty power, —neither resented—or revenged the indignity done him, but patiently suffered himself to be numbered with the transgressors.—

It could not well be otherwise, but that every eye-witness of this must have been wrought upon, in some degree, as the apostle, to let the same mind be in him which also was in Christ Jesus. Nor will it be disputed how much of the honour of St. Peter's behaviour in the present transaction might be owing to the impressions he received, on that memorable occasion of his Lord's death, sinking still deeper, from the affecting remembrance of the many instances his master had given of this engaging virtue in the course of his life.—

St. Peter certainly was of a warm and sensible nature, as we may collect from the sacred writings,—a temper fittest to receive all the advantages which such impressions could give;—and therefore, as it is a day and place sacred to this great apostle, it may not be unacceptable, if I engage the remainder of your time, in a short essay upon his character, principally as it relates to this particular disposition of heart, which is the subject of the discourse.—

This great apostle was a man of distinction amongst the disciples,—and was one of such virtues and qualifications, as seemed to have recommended him more than the advantage of his years, or knowledge.—

On his first admission to our Saviour's acquaintance, he gave a most evident testimony that he was a man of real and tender goodness, when being awakened by the miraculous draught of the fishes, as we read in the fifth of St. Luke, and knowing the author must necessarily be from God, he fell down instantly at his feet,—broke out into this humble and pious reflection;—Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!—The censure, you will say, expresses him a sinful man,—but so to censure himself,—with such unaffected modesty, implies more effectually than any thing else could,—that he was not in the common sense of the word,—a sinful, but a good man, who, like the publican in the temple, was no less justified, for a self-accusation extorted merely from the humility of

a devout heart jealous of its own imperfections.—And though the words, *depart from me*, carry in them the face of fear,—yet he who heard them; and knew the heart of the speaker, found they carried in them a greater measure of desire.—For Peter was not willing to be discharged from his new guest, but fearing his unfitness to accompany him, longed to be made more worthy of his conversation.—A meek and modest distrust of himself, seemed to have had no small share, at that time, in his natural temper and complexion; and though it would be greatly improved, and no doubt much better principled by the advantages on which I enlarged above, in his commerce and observation with his Lord and Master,—yet it appears to have been an early and distinguishing part of his character.—An instance of this, though little in itself, and omitted by the other evangelists, is preserved by St. John, in his account of our Saviour's girding himself with a napkin, and washing the disciples feet;

to which office, not one of them is represented as making any opposition; But when he came to Simon Peter,—the Evangelist tells,—Peter said to him,—Dost *Thou* wash my feet? Jesus said unto him, What I do, thou knowest not now, but shalt know hereafter.—Peter said unto him,—Thou shalt never wash my feet.—Humility for a moment triumphed over his submission,—and he expostulates with him upon it, with all the earnest and tender opposition which was natural to a humble heart, confounded with shame, that his Lord and Master should insist to do so mean and painful an act of servitude to him.—

I would sooner form a judgment of a man's temper, from his behaviour on such little occurrences of life as these, than from the more weighed and important actions, where a man is more upon his guard;—has more preparation to disguise the true disposition of his heart,—and more temptation when disguised to impose it on others.—

This management was no part of Peter's character, who, with all the real and unaffected humility which he shewed, was possessed of such a quick sensibility and promptness of nature, which utterly unfitted him for art and premeditation;—though this particular cast of temper had its disadvantages, at the same time, as it led him to an unreserved discovery of the opinions and prejudices of his heart, which he was wont to declare, and sometimes in so open and unguarded a manner, as exposed him to the sharpness of a rebuke where he could least bear it.—

I take notice of this, because it will help us in some measure to reconcile a seeming contradiction in his character, which will naturally occur here, from considering that great and capital failing of his life, when, by a presumptuous declaration of his own fortitude, he fell into the disgrace of denying his Lord; in both of which he acted so opposite to the character here given, that you will ask,—How could so humble a man as

you describe ever have been guilty of so self-sufficient and unguarded a vaunt, as that, though he should die with his Master,—yet would he not deny him?—Or whence,—that so sincere and honest a man was not better able to perform it?—

The case was this—

Our Lord, before he was betrayed, had taken occasion to admonish his disciples of the peril of lapsing,—telling them, 31st verse,—All ye shall be offended because of me this night.—To which Peter answering, with a zeal mixed with too much confidence,—That though all should be offended, yet will I *never be offended*;—to check this trust in himself,—our Saviour replies, that he in particular should deny him *thrice*.—But Peter looking upon this monition no farther than as it implied a reproach to his faith, and his love, and his courage;—stung to the heart to have them called in question by his Lord,—he hastily summons them all up to form his final resolution,—Though I should die with thee,

yet will I not deny thee.—The resolve was noble and dutiful to the last degree,—and I make no doubt as honest a one—that is, both as just in the matter, and as sincere in the intention, as ever was made by any of mankind;—his character not suffering us to imagine he made it in a braving diffimulation:—no;—for he proved himself sufficiently in earnest by his subsequent behaviour in the garden, when he drew his sword against a whole band of men, and thereby made it appear, that he had less concern for his own life, than he had for his Master's safety.—How then came his resolution to miscarry?—The reason seems purely this:—Peter grounded the execution of it upon too much confidence in himself,—doubted not but his will was in his power, whether God's grace assisted him or not;—surely thinking, that what he had courage to resolve so honestly, he had likewise ability to perform.—This was his mistake,—and, though it was a very great one,—yet was in some degree a-kin to a virtue,—as it sprung merely

from a consciousness of his integrity and truth, and too adventurous a conclusion of what they would enable him to perform, on the sharpest encounters for his Master's sake:—so that his failing in this point, was but a consequence of this hasty and ill-considered resolve;—and his Lord, to rebuke and punish him for it, did no other than leave him to his own strength to perform it;—which, in effect, was almost the same as leaving him to the necessity of not performing it at all.—The great apostle had not considered, that he who cautioned him was the searcher of hearts,—and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man;—he did not remember, that his Lord had said before,—Without me ye can do nothing;—that the exertions of all our faculties were under the power of his will:—he had forgot the knowledge of this needful truth, on this one unhappy juncture,—where he had so great a temptation to the contrary,—though he was full of the persuasion in every other transaction of

his life,—but most visibly here in the text,—where he breaks forth in the warm language of a heart still overflowing with remembrance of this very mistake he had once committed;—Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this?—as though by our own power and holiness we had wrought this?—the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,—the God of our fathers, through faith in his name, hath made this man whole, whom ye see and know.—

This is the best answer I am able to make to this objection against the uniformity of the apostle's character which I have given:—upon which let it be added,—that was no such apology capable of being made in its behalf;—that the truth and regularity of a character is not, in justice, to be looked upon as broken, from any one single act or omission which may seem a contradiction to it:—the best of men appear sometimes to be strange compounds of contradictory qualities: and, were the accidental oversights and folly of the wisest man,

—the failings and imperfections of a religious man,—the hasty acts and passionate words of a meek man—were they to rise up in judgment against them,—and an ill-natured judge be suffered to mark in this manner what has been done amiss—what character so unexceptionable as to be able to stand before him? —So that, with the candid allowances which the infirmities of a man may claim when he falls through surprise more than a premeditation,—one may venture upon the whole to sum up Peter's character in a few words.—He was a man sensible in his nature,—of quick passions, tempered with the greatest humility and most unaffected poverty of spirit that ever met in such a character.—So that in the only criminal instance of his life, which I have spoken to, you are at a loss which to admire most;—the tenderness and sensibility of his soul, in being wrought upon to repentance by a look from Jesus;—or the uncommon humility of it, which he testified thereupon, in the bitterness of his sorrow for

what he had done.—He was once presumptuous in trusting to his own strength; his general and true character was that of the most engaging meekness,—distrustful of himself and his abilities to the last degree.—

He denied his master.—But in all instances of his life, but that, was a man of the greatest truth and sincerity;—to which part of his character our Saviour has given an undeniable testimony, in conferring on him the symbolical name of Cephas, a rock, a name the most expressive of constancy and firmness.—

He was a man of great love to his master—and of no less zeal for his religion, of which, from among many, I shall take one instance out of St. John, with which I shall conclude this account.—Where, upon the desertion of several other disciples,—our Saviour puts the question to the twelve,—Will ye also go away?—Then, says the text, Peter answered and said,—Lord! whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life,—and we believe, and know, that

thou art Christ the Son of God.—Now, if we look into the gospel, we find what our Saviour pronounced on this very confession.

Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,—but my Father which is in heaven.—That our Saviour had the words of eternal life,—Peter was able to deduce from principles of natural reason; because reason was able to judge from the internal marks of his doctrine, that it was worthy God, and accommodated properly to advance human nature and human happiness.—But for all this,—reason could not infallibly determine that the messenger of this doctrine was the Messias, the eternal Son of the living God:—to know this required an illumination;—and this illumination, I say, seems to have been vouchsafed at that instant as a reward,—as would have been sufficient evidence by itself of the disposition of his heart.—

I have now finished this short essay upon the character of St. Peter, not with

a loud panegyric upon the power of his keys, or a ranting encomium upon some monastic qualifications, with which a popish pulpit would ring upon such an occasion, without doing much honour to the saint, or good to the audience;—but have drawn it with truth and sobriety, representing it as it was, as consisting of virtues the most worthy of imitation,—and grounded, not upon apocryphal accounts and legendary inventions, the wardrobe from whence popery dresses out her saints on these days,—but upon matters of fact in the sacred Scriptures, in which all christians agree.—And since I have mentioned *popery*, I cannot better conclude than by observing, how ill the spirit and character of that church resembles that particular part of St. Peter's which has been made the subject of this discourse.—Would one think that a church, which thrusts itself under this apostle's patronage, and claims her power under him, would presume to exceed the degrees of it which he acknowledged to possess himself?—But how ill

are your expectations answered, when, instead of the humble declaration in the text,—Ye men of Israel, marvel not at us, as if our own power and holiness had wrought this;—you hear a language and behaviour from the Romish court, as opposite to it as insolent words and actions can frame.—

So that instead of, Ye men of Israel, marvel not at us,—Ye men of Israel, *do* marvel at us,—hold us in admiration:—Approach our sacred pontiff—(who is not only holy—but holiness itself)—approach his person with reverence, and deem it the greatest honour and happiness of your lives to fall down before his chair, and be admitted to kiss his feet.—

Think not, as if it were not our own holiness which merits all the homage you can pay us.—It is our own holiness,—the superabundance of it, of which, having more than we know what to do with ourselves,—from works of supererogation, we have transferred the surplus in ecclesiastic warehouses, and, in pure

zeal for the good of your souls, have established public banks of merit, ready to be drawn upon at all times.—

Think not, ye men of Israel, or say within yourselves, that we are unprofitable servants;—we have no good works to spare, or that, if we had—we cannot make this use of them;—that we have no power to circulate our indulgences,—and huckster them out, as we do, through all the parts of Christendom.— Know ye by these presents, that it is our own power which does this,—the plenitude of our apostolic power operating with our own holiness, that enables us to bind and loose, as seems meet to us on earth;—to save your souls or deliver them up to Satan, and, as they please or displease, to indulge whole kingdoms at once, or excommunicate them all;—binding kings in chains, and your nobles in links of iron.—

That we may never again feel the effects of such language and principles,—may God of his mercy grant us. Amen.

SEE MON XXII

ask for good of your souls have
established public banks of money ready
to be drawn upon at all times —
I think you go near to that, for it
is in ourselves that we are unprofitable
to others — we have no good works
to show, or that if we do — we cannot
make use of them — that we have
no power to instruct our neighbours —
and therefore them out of the
image of the sun of righteousness —
I know we are great sinners, that it is our
overpowering which does this — the child
of our apostolic days — one who
was not over himself, and would be to
help and comfort as many as he could
bring to the Lord Jesus in his
heart to be saved, and as they pleased or
displeased, so he let whose language it
once of conversation with him —
singing hymns in church, and your notes
in hall of him —
I have met him in again and for the
less of such language and principles —
my God of his mercy grant us. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXII.

Thirtieth of January.

EZRA IX. 6, 7.

And I said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God :—for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.—Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day.—

THERE is not, I believe, throughout all history, an instance of so strange and obstinately corrupt a people as the Jews, of whom Ezra complains ;—for though, on one hand,—there never was a people that received so many testimonies of God's favour, to encourage them to be good,—so, on the other hand, there never was a people which so often felt the scourge of their iniquities, to dishearten them from doing evil.—

And yet neither the one or the other seem'd ever able to make them either the wiser or better;—neither God's blessings, nor his corrections, could ever soften them;—they still continued a thankless, unthinking people,—who profited by no lessons, neither were to be won with mercies, nor terrified with punishments,—but, on every succeeding trial and occasion, extremely disposed against God, to go astray and act wickedly.

In the words of the text, the prophet's heart overflows with sorrow, upon his reflection of this unworthy part of their character; and the manner of his application to God is so expressive of his humble sense of it,—and there is something in the words so full of tenderness and shame for them upon that score,—as bespeaks the most paternal, as well as pastoral concern for them.—And he said,—O my God! I am ashamed,—and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God.—No doubt the holy man was confounded to look back upon

that long series of so many of God's undeserved mercies to them, of which they had made so bad and ungrateful a use:—he considered, that they had all the motives that could lay restraints either upon a considerate or a reasonable people;—that God had not only created, upheld, and favoured them with all advantages in common with the rest of their fellow-creatures,—but had been particularly kind to them;—that when they were in the house of bondage, in the most hopeless condition,—he had heard their cry and took compassion upon their afflictions, and, by a chain of great and mighty deliverances, had set them free from the yoke of oppression.—The prophet, no doubt, reflected at the same time, that, besides this instance of God's goodness in first favouring their miraculous escape, a series of successes, not to be accounted for from second causes, and the natural course of events, had crowned their heads in so remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of God's general con-

cern, but of his particular providence and attachment to them above all people:—in the wilderness he led them like sheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye;—he suffered no man to do them wrong,—but reproved even kings for their sake;—that when they entered into the promised land, no force was able to stand before them;—when in possession,—no army was ever able to drive them out;—that nations greater and mightier than they, were thrust forth from before them:—that, in a word, all nature for a time was driven backwards by the hands of GOD, to serve them, and that even the Sun itself had stood still in the midst of heaven, to secure their victories;—that when all these mercies were cast away upon them,—and no principle of gratitude or interest could make them an obedient people,—GOD had tried by misfortunes to bring them back;—that when instructions, warnings, invitations, miracles, prophets, and holy guides had no effect,—he at last suffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting

them fall again into the same state of bondage in Babylon, from whence he had first raised them.—Here it is that Ezra pours out his confession.—It was no small aggravation to Ezra's concern, to find that even this last trial had no good effect upon their conduct;—that all the alternatives of promises and threats, comforts and afflictions, instead of making them grow the better,—made them apparently grow the worse:—how could he intercede for them, but with shame and sorrow;—and say, as in the text,—O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee,—for our iniquities are increased over our heads,—and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens;—since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day.—

Thus much for the prophet's humble confession to God for the Jews, for which he had but too just a foundation given by them;—and I know not how I can make a better use of the words, as the occasion of the day led me to the

choice of them,—than by a serious application of the same sad confession, in regard to ourselves.—

Our fathers, like those of the Jews in Ezra's time,—no doubt have done amiss, and greatly provoked God by their violence;—but if our own iniquities, like theirs, are increased over our heads;—if since the days of our fathers we have been in great trespass ourselves unto this day,—'tis fit this day we should be put in mind of it;—nor can the time and occasion be better employed, than in hearing with patience the reproofs which such a parallel will lead me to give.—

It must be acknowledged, there is no nation which had ever so many extraordinary reasons and supernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous as the Jews had;—yet, at the same time, there is no one which has not sufficient (and setting aside at present the consideration of a future state as a reward for being so)—there is no nation under heaven, which, besides the daily blessings of God's providence to them, but have re-

ceived sufficient blessings and mercies at the hands of GOD to engage their best services, and the warmest returns of gratitude they can pay:—there has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from some grievous calamity, —from the rage of pestilence or famine, —from the edge and fury of the sword, —from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them;—they may have been preserved by providential discoveries, from plots and designs against the well-being of their states,—or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour when beginning to sink;—by some signal interposition of GOD's providence;—they may have rescued their liberties, and all that was dear to them, from the jaws of some tyrant;—or may have preserved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts failed them.—

If other countries have reason to be thankful to GOD for any one of these mercies, much more has *this* of ours, which at one time or other hath received them all;—inasmuch that our history,

for this last century, has scarce been any thing else but the history of our deliverances, and God's blessings,—and these in so complicated a chain, and with so little interruption,—as to be scarce ever vouchsafed to any nation or language besides,—except the Jews;—and with regard to them, though inferior in the stupendous manner of their working,—yet no way so in the extensive goodness of their effects, and the infinite benevolence which must have wrought them for us. —Here then let us stop and look back a moment, and enquire, as in the case of the Jews, what great effects all this has had upon our lives,—and how far worthy we have lived—of what we have received?—

A stranger,—when we heard that this island had been so favoured by heaven,—so happy in our laws and religion,—so flourishing in our trade,—so blessed in our situation and natural product,—and in all of them so often,—so visibly protected by Providence,—would conclude, our gratitude and morals had kept pace with our

blessings;—and he would say,—as we are the most blessed and favoured,—that we must be the most virtuous and religious people upon the face of the earth.

Would to GOD! there was any other reason to incline one to so charitable a belief;—for, without running into any common-place declamation upon the wickedness of the age,—we may say within the bounds of truth,—that we have profited in this respect as little as it was possible for the Jews;—that there is as little virtue,—and as little sense of religion, at least as little of the appearance of it, as can be supposed to exist at all, in a country where it is countenanced by the state.—Our forefathers, whatever greater degrees of real virtue they were possessed of—GOD,—who searcheth the heart,—best knows;—but this is certain, in their days they had at least—the form of godliness,—and paid this compliment to religion, as to wear at least the appearance and outward garb of it.—The public service of GOD was better frequented,—and in a devout, as

well as regular manner;—there was no open profaneness in our streets to put piety to the blush,—or domestic ridicule, to make her uneasy, and force her to withdraw.

Religion, though treated with freedom, was still treated with respect;—the youth of both sexes kept under greater restraint;—good orders and good hours were then kept up in most families; and, in a word, a greater strictness and sobriety of manners maintained throughout amongst people of all ranks and conditions;—so that vice, however secretly it might be practised,—was ashamed to be seen.—

But all this has insensibly been borne down, ever since the days of our forefathers trespass;—when, to avoid one extreme, we began to run into another;—so that instead of any great religion amongst us, you see thousands who are tired even of the form of it, and who have at length thrown the mask of it aside,—as an useless incumbrance.—

But this licentiousness, he would say, may be chiefly owing to a long course of prosperity, which is apt to corrupt men's minds.—God has since this tried you with afflictions;—you have been visited with a long and expensive war:—God has sent, moreover, a pestilence amongst your cattle, which has cut off the stock from the fold,—and left no herd in the stalls.—Surely he'll say,—two such terrible scourges must have awakened the consciences of the most unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your lands—from such admonitions,—though they failed with the Jews, to have learnt righteousness for themselves.—

I own this is the natural effect,—and one would hope should always be the natural use and improvement from such calamities;—for we often find that numbers who, in prosperity, seem to forget God, do yet remember him in the day of trouble and distress.—Yet consider this nationally,—we see no such effect from it in fact, as one would be

led to expect from the speculation:—for instance,—with all the devastation, bloodshed, and expence which the war has occasioned,—how many converts has it made to frugality,—to virtue, or even to seriousness itself?—The pestilence amongst our cattle,—though it has distressed and utterly undone so many thousands, yet what one visible alteration has it made in the course of our lives?—

And though one would imagine that the necessary drains of taxes for the one,—and the loss of rents and property from the other, should in some measure have withdrawn the means of gratifying our passions, as we have done;—yet what appearance is there amongst us, that it is so?—

What one fashionable folly or extravagance has been checked by it?—Is not there the same luxury and epicurism of entertainments at our tables?—do we not pursue with eagerness the same giddy round of trifling diversions?—is not the infection diffused amongst

people of all ranks, and all ages?— And even grey hairs, whose sober example and manners ought to check the extravagant sallies of the thoughtless, gay, and unexperienced,—too often totter under the same costly ornaments, and join the general riot. Where vanity, like this, governs the heart, even charity will allow us to suppose, that a consciousness of their inability to pursue greater excesses, is the only vexation of spirit.—In truth, the observation falls in with the main intention of the discourse,—which is not framed to flatter your follies,—but plainly to point them out, and shew you the general corruption of manners, and want of religion;—which all men see,—and which the wise and good so much lament.—

But the inquirer will naturally go on, and say, that though this representation does not answer his expectations, that undoubtedly we must have profited by these lessons in other respects;—that though we have not approved our understanding in the sight of God, by a

virtuous use of our misfortunes, to true wisdom;—that we must have improved them, however, to political wisdom;—so that he would say,—though the English do not appear to be a religious people,—they are at least a loyal one:—They have so often felt the scourge of rebellion, and have tasted so much sharp fruit from it,—as to have set their teeth on edge for ever.—But, good God! how would he be astonished to find,—that though we have been so often tost to and fro by our own tempestuous humours,—that we were not yet sick of the storm;—that though we solemnly, on every return of this day, lament the guilt of our forefathers in staining their hands in blood,—we never once think of our principles and practices, which tend the same way:—and though the providence of God has set bounds, that they do not work as much mischief,—as in days of distraction and desolation,—little reason have we to ascribe the merit thereof to our own wisdom;—so that, when the whole account

is stated betwixt us,—there seems nothing to prevent the application of the words in the text;—that our iniquities are encreased over our heads, and our trespass is grown up unto the heaven. —Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day;—and though it is fit and becoming that we weep for them,—’tis much more so, that we weep for ourselves,—that we lament our own corruptions,—and the little advantages we have made of the mercies or chastisements of God, or from the sins and provocations of our forefathers.—

This is the fruit we are to gather, in a day of such humiliation;—and unless it produces that for us, by a reformation of our manners, and by turning us from the error of our ways,—the service of this day is more a senseless insult upon the memories of our ancestors,—than an honest design to profit by their mistakes and misfortunes,—and to become wiser and better from our reflections upon them.—

Till this is done, it avails little, though we pray fervently to GOD not to lay their sins to our charge—whilst we have so many remaining of our own.—Unless we are touched for ourselves, how can we expect he should hear our cry? It is the wicked corruption of a people which they are to thank for whatever natural calamities they feel;—this is the very state we are in,—which by disengaging Providence from taking our part,—will always leave a people exposed to the whole force of accidents, both from within and without:—and however statesmen may dispute about the causes of the growth or decay of kingdoms,—it is for this cause, a matter of eternal truth,—that as virtue and religion are our only recommendation to GOD,—that they are, consequently, the only true basis of our happiness and prosperity on earth.—And however we may shelter ourselves under distinctions of party,—that a wicked man is the worst enemy the state has;—and for the contrary, it will always be found, that

a virtuous man is the best patriot, and the best subject the king has.—And though an individual may say, what will my righteousness profit a nation of men? —I answer,—if it fail of a blessing here (which is not likely), it will have one advantage,—it will save thy own soul, and give thee that peace at the last, which this world cannot take away.—

Which GOD, of his infinite mercy, grant us all. Amen.

33
LXXXII
A virtuous man is the best partner, and
the best subject the king has.—And
though an individual may say, what will
my righteousness profit a nation of men?
—I answer—it is full of a blessing here
(which is not likely) it will have one
advantage—it will turn thy own soul,
and give thee that peace at the last,
which this world cannot take away.—
—Which God, of his infinite mercy,
grant us all. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXIII.

ROMANS II. 4.

Despiseſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and forbearance, and long ſuffering—knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth thee to repentance?

So ſays St. Paul. And

ECCLESIASTES VIII. II.

Be cauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.—

TAKE either as you like it, you will get nothing by the bargain.—

'Tis a terrible character of the world, which Solomon is here accounting for,—that their hearts were fully ſet in them to do evil.—And the general outcry againſt the wickedneſs of the age, in every age, from Solomon's down to this, ſhews but too lamentably what grounds have all along been given for the complaint.—

The disorder and confusion arising in the affairs of the world from the wickedness of it, being ever such,—so evidently seen, so severely felt, as naturally to induce every one who was a spectator or a sufferer, to give the melancholy preference to the times he lived in; as if the corruptions of men's manners had not only exceeded the reports of former days, but the power almost of rising above the pitch to which the wickedness of the age was arrived—How far they may have been deceived in such calculations, I shall not inquire;—let it suffice, that mankind have ever been bad,—considering what motives they have had to be better;—and taking this for granted, instead of declaiming against it, let us see whether a discourse may not be as serviceable, by endeavouring, as Solomon has here done, rather to give an account of it, and by tracing back the evils to their first principles, to direct ourselves to the true remedy against them.—

Let it here only be premised,—that the wickedness either of the present or past times, whatever scandal and reproach it brings upon christians,—ought not in reason to reflect dishonour upon christianity, which is so apparently well framed to make us good;—that there is not a greater paradox in nature,—than that so good a religion should be no better recommended by its professors.—Though this may seem a paradox,—’tis still, I say, no objection, though it has often been made use of against christianity;—since, if the morals of men are not reformed, it is not owing to a defect in the revelation, but ’tis owing to the same causes which defeated all the use and intent of reason,—before revelation was given.—For setting aside the obligations which a divine law lays upon us—whoever considers the state and condition of human nature, and upon this view, how much stronger the natural motives are to virtue than to vice, would expect to find the world much better than it is, or ever has

been.—For who would suppose the generality of mankind to betray so much folly, as to act against the common interest of their own kind, as every man does who yields to the temptation of what is wrong.—But on the other side, —if men first look into the practice of the world, and there observe the strange prevalency of vice, and how willing men are to defend as well as to commit it,—one would think they believed that all discourses of virtue and honesty were mere matter of speculation for men to entertain some idle hours with;—and say truly, that men seemed universally to be agreed in nothing but in speaking well and doing ill.—But this casts no more dishonour upon reason than it does upon revelation;—the truth of the case being this,—that no motives have been great enough to restrain those from sin who have secretly loved it, and only sought pretences for the practice of it.—So that if the light of the gospel has not left a sufficient provision against the wickedness of the world,—the true an-

swer is, that there can be none.—'Tis sufficient that the excellency of christianity in doctrine and precepts, and its proper tendency to make us virtuous as well as happy, is a strong evidence of its divine original,—and these advantages it has above any institution that ever was in the world:—it gives the best directions,—the best examples,—the greatest encouragements,—the best helps, and the greatest obligations to gratitude.—But as religion was not to work upon men by way of force and natural necessity,—but by moral persuasion,—which sets good and evil before them;—so that, if men have power to do evil, or chuse the good, and will abuse it, this cannot be avoided;—not only religion, but even reason itself, must necessarily imply a freedom of choice; and all the beings in the world, which have it, were created free to stand or free to fall:—and therefore men that will not be wrought upon by this way of address, must expect, and be contented, to feel the stroke of that rod which is prepared

for the back of fools, oft-times in this world, but undoubtedly in the next, from the hands of a righteous governor, who will finally render to every man according to his works.—

Because this sentence is not always executed speedily, is the wise man's account of the general licentiousness which prevailed through the race of mankind,—so early as his days; and we may allow it a place, amongst the many other fatal causes of depravation in our own;—a few of which, I shall beg leave to add to this explication of the wise man's; subjoining a few practical cautions in relation to each, as I go along.—

To begin with Solomon's account in the text,—that because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.—

It seems somewhat hard to understand the consequence, why men should grow more desperately wicked,—because God is merciful and gives them

space to repent;—this is no natural effect,—nor does the wise man intend to insinuate, that the goodness and long suffering of God is the cause of the wickedness of man, by a direct efficacy to harden sinners in their course.—But the scope of his discourse is this, Because a vicious man escapes at present, he is apt to draw false conclusions from it, and, from the delay of God's punishments in this life, either to conceive them at so remote a distance, or perhaps so uncertain, that, though he has some doubtful misgivings of the future, yet he hopes, in the main, that his fears are greater than his danger;—and, from observing some of the worst of men both live and die without any outward testimony of God's wrath,—draws from thence some flattering ground of encouragement for himself, and, with the wicked in the psalm, says in his heart, Truly, I shall never be cast down, there shall no harm happen unto me:—as if it was necessary, if God is to punish at all, that he must do it presently;—which, by

the way, would rather seem to bespeak the rage and fury of an incensed party, than the determination of a wise and patient judge,—who respites punishment to another state, declaring, for the wisest reasons, this is not the time for it to take place in,—but that he has appointed a day for it, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and make such unalterable distinctions betwixt the good and bad,—as to render his future judgment a full vindication of his justice.—

That mankind have ever made an ill use of this forbearance, is, and I fear will ever be, the case:—and St. Peter, in his description of the scoffers in the latter days, who, he tells us, shall walk after their own lusts (the worst of all characters), he gives the same sad solution of what should be their unhappy encouragement;—for that they would say, —Where is the promise [where is the threatening or declaration of, *ἡ ἐπαγγελία*] of his coming,—for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;—

that is, the world goes on in the same uninterrupted course, where all things fall alike to all without any interposition from above,—or any outward token of divine displeasure:—upon this ground, “Come ye,” say they, as the prophet represents them, “I will fetch wine and we will fill ourselves with strong drink, and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.”——

Now, if you consider, you will find, that all this false way of reasoning doth arise from that gross piece of self-flattery, that such do imagine God to be like themselves,—that is, as cruel and revengeful as they are,—and they presently think, if a fellow-creature offended them at the rate that sinners are said to offend God, and they had as much power in their hands to punish and torture them as he has, they would be sure to execute it speedily;—but because they see God does it not, therefore they conclude, that all the talk of God’s anger against vice, and his future punishment of it,—is mere talk, calculated for the

terror of old women and children.—Thus speak they peace to their souls, when there is no peace;—for though a sinner, (which the wise man adds by way of caution after the text)—for though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged upon the earth,—yet sure I know, that it shall be well with them that fear God,—but shall not be well with the wicked.—Upon which argument, the psalmist, speaking in the name of God,—uses this remonstrance to one under this fatal mistake which has misled thousands;—these things thou didst, and I kept silence:—And it seems this silence was interpreted into consent;—for it follows,—and thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself;—but the psalmist adds, how ill he took this at men's hands, and that they should not know the difference between the forbearance of sinners,—and his neglect of their sins;—but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thee.—Upon the whole of which, he bids them be better advised, and consider, lest, while

they forget God, he pluck them away, and there be none to deliver them.—

Thus much for the first ground and cause which the text gives, why the hearts of the sons of men are so fully set in them to do evil;—upon which I have only one or two cautions to add.—That, in the first place we frequently deceive ourselves in the calculation that sentence shall not be speedily executed.—By sad experience, vicious and debauched men find this matter to turn out very different in practice, from their expectations in theory: God having so contrived the nature of things throughout the whole system of moral duties,—that every vice, in some measure, should immediately revenge itself upon the doer;—that falsehood, and unfair dealing, ends in distrust and dishonour;—that drunkenness and debauchery should weaken the thread of life, and cut it so short that the transgressor shall not live out half his days;—that pride should be followed by mortifications;—extravagance by poverty and distress;—that the revengeful and malicious should be the

greatest tormentor of himself,—the perpetual disturbance of his own mind being so immediate a chastisement, as to verify what the wise man says upon it,—That, as the merciful man does good to his own soul, so he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.

In all which cases there is a punishment independent of these, and that is, the punishment which a man's own mind takes upon itself, from the remorse of doing what is wrong.—*Prima est hæc ultio*,—this is the first revenge which (whatever other punishments he may escape) is sure to follow close upon his heels, and haunts him wheresoever he goes;—for whenever a man commits a wilful bad action,—he drinks down poison, which, though it may work slowly, will work surely, and give him perpetual pains and heart aches,—and if no means be used to expel it, will destroy him at last.—So that, notwithstanding that final sentence of God is not executed speedily in exact weight and measure,—there is nevertheless a sentence executed, which a man's own conscience pronounces

against him;—and every wicked man, I believe, feels as regular a process within his own breast commenced against himself, and finds himself as much accused, and as evidently and impartially condemned for what he has done amiss, as if he had received sentence before the most awful tribunal;—which judgment of conscience, as it can be looked upon in no other light but as an anticipation of that righteous and unalterable sentence which will be pronounced hereafter by that Being to whom he is finally to give an account of his actions—I cannot conceive the state of his mind under any character than of that anxious doubtfulness described by the prophet,—That the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and filth.

A second caution against this uniform ground of false hope, in sentence not being executed speedily, will arise from this consideration,—That in our vain calculation of this distant point of retribution, we generally respite it to the day

of judgment; and as that may be a thousand, or ten thousand years off, it proportionably lessens the terror.—To rectify this mistake, we should first consider, that the distance of a thing no way alters the nature of it.—2dly, That we are deceived in this distant prospect, not considering that however far off we may fix it in this belief, that in fact it is no farther off from every man than the day of his own death.—And how certain that day is, we need not surely be reminded:—'Tis the certainty of the matter, and of an event which will as surely come to pass, as that the Sun shall rise to-morrow morning,—that should enter as much into our calculations, as if it was hanging over our heads.—For though, in our fond imaginations, we dream of living many years upon the earth;—how unexpectedly are we summoned from it?—How oft, in the strength of our age, in the midst of our projects,—when we are promising ourselves the ease of many years?—how oft, at that very time, and in the height of

this imagination, is the decree sealed, and the commandment gone forth to call us into another world?—

This may suffice for the examination of this one great cause of the corruption of the world;—from whence I should proceed, as I purposed, to an inquiry after some other unhappy causes which have a share in this evil.—But I have taken up so much more of your time in this than I first intended,—that I shall defer what I have to say to the next occasion, and put an end to this discourse, by an answer to a question often asked relatively to this argument, in prejudice of christianity, which cannot be more seasonably answered than in a discourse at this time;—and that is,—Whether the christian religion has done the world any service in reforming the lives and morals of mankind,—which some, who pretend to have considered the present state of vice, seem to doubt of?—This objection I, in some measure, have anticipated in the beginning of this discourse;—and what I have to add to that

argument is this,—that as it is impossible to decide the point by evidence of facts, which at so great a distance cannot be brought together and compared,—it must be decided by reason, and the probability of things; upon which issue, one might appeal to the most professed deist, and trust him to determine,—whether the lives of those who are set loose from all obligations,—but those of convenience,—can be compared with those who have been blest with the extraordinary light of a religion?—and whether so just and holy a religion as the christian, which sets restraints even upon our thoughts,—a religion which gives us the most engaging ideas of the perfections of God,—at the same time that it impresses the most awful ones of his majesty and power;—a Being rich in mercies, but if they are abused, terrible in his judgments;—one constantly about our secret paths,—about our beds:—who spieth out all our ways,—noticeth all our actions, and is so pure in his nature, that he will punish even the wicked imaginations of

the heart, and has appointed a day wherein he will enter into this enquiry, and execute judgment according as we have deserved.—

If either the hopes or fears, the passions or reason of men are to be wrought upon at all, such principles must have an effect, though, I own, very far short of what a thinking man should expect from such motives.—

No doubt, there is great room for amendment in the christian world,—and the professors of our holy religion may in general be said to be a very corrupt and bad generation of men,—considering what reasons and obligations they have to be better.—Yet still I affirm, if those restraints were lessened,—the world would be infinitely worse;—and therefore we cannot sufficiently bless and adore the goodness of God, for these advantages brought by the coming of Christ—which God grant that we may live to be more deserving of;—that, in the last day, when he shall come again to judge the world, we may rise to life immortal. Amen.

S E R M O N

the heart, and has appeared to day
 wherein I shall once and for ever
 and a long time, my heart according to
 have the heart—
 to make the heart of man to be brought
 down or taken of man to be brought
 upon at all, with prayers and tears
 of the heart, I own that I have of
 that a thing, and that I have of
 that heart—
 the heart, there is great room for
 abundance in the Christian world—and
 the possibility of our holy religion is
 great, and to be a very common thing
 all generations of men—and that
 who are in and out of the world, and
 in heart, and all I shall say, that
 hearts were taken—and that would
 the heart were—and that would
 cannot be taken by the heart, and that
 God is of God, for that all things
 brought to the heart of Christ—when
 God said that we may be more
 living of the heart in the world, when
 in that heart again to save the world,
 as the heart is the heart. Amen.

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S E R M O N XXXIV.

Trust in God.

PSALM XXXVII. 3.

Put thou thy trust in the Lord.—

WHOEVER seriously reflects upon the state and condition of man, and looks upon that dark side of it, which represents his life as open to so many causes of trouble;—when he sees how often he eats the bread of affliction, and that he is born to it as naturally as the sparks fly upwards;—that no rank or degrees of men are exempted from this law of our beings;—but that all, from the high cedar of Libanus to the humble shrub upon the wall, are shook in their turns by numberless calamities and distresses:—when one sits down and looks upon this gloomy side of things, with all the sorrowful changes and chances which

surround us,—at first sight,—would not one wonder,—how the spirit of a man could bear the infirmities of his nature, and what it is that supports him, as it does, under the many evil accidents which he meets with in his passage through the valley of tears?—Without some certain aid within us to bear us up,—so tender a frame as ours would be but ill fitted to encounter what generally befalls it in this rugged journey:—and accordingly we find,—that we are so curiously wrought by an all-wise hand, with a view to this,—that, in the very composition and texture of our nature, there is a remedy and provision left against most of the evils we suffer;—we being so ordered,—that the principle of self-love, given us for preservation, comes in here to our aid,—by opening a door of hope, and, in the worst emergencies, flattering us with a belief that we shall extricate ourselves, and live to see better days.—

This expectation,—though in fact it no way alters the nature of the cross ac-

cidents to which we lie open, or does at all pervert the course of them,—yet imposes upon the sense of them, and, like a secret spring in a well-contrived machine, though it cannot prevent, at least it counterbalances the pressure,—and so bears up this tottering, tender frame under many a violent shock and hard jostling, which otherwise would unavoidably overwhelm it.—Without such an inward resource, from an inclination, which is natural to man, to trust and hope for redress in the most deplorable conditions,—his state in this life would be, of all creatures, the most miserable.—When his mind was either wrung with affliction,—or his body lay tortured with the gout or stone,—did he think that in this world there should be no respite to his sorrow;—could he believe the pains he endured would continue equally intense,—without remedy,—without intermission;—with what deplorable lamentation would he languish out his day,—and how sweet, as Job says, would the *clods of the valley be to him?*—But so sad

a persuasion, whatever grounds there may be sometimes for it, scarce ever gets full possession of the mind of man, which by nature struggles against despair: so that whatever part of us suffers,—the darkest mind instantly ushers in this relief to it,—points out to hope, encourages to build, though on a sandy foundation, and raises an expectation in us, that things will come to a fortunate issue.—And indeed it is something surprising to consider the strange force of this passion;—what wonders it has wrought in supporting men's spirits in all ages, and under such inextricable difficulties, that they have sometimes hoped, as the apostle expresses it, even against hope,—against all likelihood;—and have looked forwards with comfort under misfortunes, when there has been little or nothing to favour such an expectation.

This flattering propensity in us, which I have here represented, as it is built upon one of the most deceitful of human passions—(that is),—self-love, which at all times inclines us to think better of

ourselves, and conditions, than there is ground for;—how great soever the relief is, which a man draws from it at present, it too often disappoints in the end, leaving him to go on his way sorrowing,—mourning,—as the prophet says, that his hope is lost.—So that, after all, in our severer trials, we still find a necessity of calling in something to aid this principle, and direct it so, that it may not wander with this uncertain expectation of what may never be accomplished,—but fix itself upon a proper object of trust and reliance, that is able to fulfil our desires, to hear our cry, and to help us.—The passion of hope, without this, though in straits a man may support his spirits for a time with a general expectation of better fortune;—yet, like a ship tossed without a pilot upon a troublesome sea,—it may float upon the surface for a while, but is never,—never likely to be brought to the haven where it would be.—To accomplish this,—reason and religion are called in at length, and join with nature in exhort-

ing us to hope;—but to hope in God, in whose hands are the issues of life and death,—and without whose knowledge and permission we know that not a hair of our heads can fall to the ground.—Strengthened with this anchor of hope, which keeps us stedfast, when the rains descend, and the floods come upon us, —however the sorrows of a man are multiplied, he bears up his head, looks towards heaven with confidence, waiting for the salvation of God:—he then builds upon a rock against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.—He may be troubled, it is true, on every side, but shall not be distressed,—perplexed, yet not in despair:—though he walks through the valley of the shadow of death, even then he fears no evil; this rod and this staff comfort him.

The virtue of this had been sufficiently tried by David, and had, no doubt, been of use to him in the course of a life full of afflictions; many of which were so great, that he declares, that he should verily have fainted under the sense and

apprehension of them, but that he believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.—He believed!—how could he do otherwise? He had all the conviction that reason and inspiration could give him,—that there was a Being in whom every thing concurred which could be the proper object of trust and confidence;—power to help,—and goodness always to incline him to do it.—He knew this infinite Being, though his dwelling was so high—that his glory was above the heavens,—yet humbled himself to behold the things that are done in heaven and earth:—that he was not an idle and distant spectator of what passed there, but that he was a present help in time of trouble:—that he bowed the heavens and came down to over-rule the course of things; delivering the poor, and him that was in misery, from him that was too strong for him; lifting the simple out of his distress, and guarding him by his providence, so that no man should do him wrong:—that neither the Sun should

smite him by day, neither the Moon by night.—Of this the Psalmist had such evidence from his observation on the life of others, with the strongest conviction, at the same time, which a long life full of personal deliverances could give;—all which taught him the value of the lesson in the text, from which he had received so much encouragement himself,—that he transmits it for the benefit of the whole race of mankind after him, to support them, as it had done him, under the afflictions which beset him.

Trust in God;—as if he had said, Whosoever thou art that shalt hereafter fall into any such straits or troubles as I have experienced,—learn by my example where to seek for succour;—trust not in princes, nor in any child of man, for there is no help in them:—the sons of men, who are of low degree, are vanity, and are not able to help thee;—men of high degree are a lie,—too often deceive thy hopes, and will not help thee:—but thou, when thy soul is in heaviness,—turn thy eyes from the earth,

and look up towards heaven, to that infinitely kind and powerful Being, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth; who is a present help in time of trouble:—despond not, and say within thyself,—why his chariot wheels stay so long?—and why he vouchsafeth thee not a speedy relief?—but arm thyself in thy misfortunes with patience and fortitude;—trust in GOD, who sees all those conflicts under which thou labourest,—who knows thy necessities afar off,—and puts all thy tears into his bottle;—who sees every careful thought and pensive look,—and hears every sigh and melancholy groan thou utterest.—

In all thy exigencies trust and depend on him;—nor ever doubt but he, who heareth the cry of the fatherless, and defendeth the cause of the widow, if it is just, will hear thine, and either lighten thy burden, and let thee go free;—or, which is the same, if that seems not meet, by adding strength to thy mind, to enable thee to sustain what he has suffered to be laid upon thee.

Whoever recollects the particular psalms said to be composed by this great man, under the several distresses and cross accidents of his life, will perceive the justice of this paraphrase, which is agreeable to the strain of reasoning,—which runs through,—which is little else than a recollection of his own words and thoughts upon those occasions, in all which he appears to have been no less signal in his afflictions, than in his piety, and in that goodness of soul which he discovers under them.—I said, the reflections upon his own life and providential escapes, which he had experienced, had had a share in forming these religious sentiments of trust in his mind, which had so early taken root, that when he was going to fight the Philistine,—when he was but a youth and stood before Saul,—he had already learned to argue in this manner:—Let no man's heart fail him;—thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, and I went out after him

and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by the beard, and smote him, and slew him;—thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine will be as one of them;—for the Lord, who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear,—he will also deliver me out of his hand.—

The conclusion was natural, and the experience which every man has had of God's former loving-kindness and protection to him, either in dangers or distress, does unavoidably engage him to think in the same train.—It is observable that the apostle St. Paul, encouraging the Corinthians to bear with patience the trials incident to human nature, reminds them of the deliverances that God did formerly vouchsafe to him, and his fellow-labourers, Gaius and Aristarchus;—and on that ground builds a rock of encouragement, for future trust and dependence on him.—His life had been in very great jeopardy

at Ephesus,—where he had like to have been brought out to the theatre, to be devoured by wild beasts, and indeed had no human means to avert,—and consequently to escape it;—and therefore, he tells them, that he had this advantage by it, that the more he believed he should be put to death, the more he was engaged by his deliverance, never to depend on any worldly trust, but only on GOD, who can rescue from the greatest extremity, even from the grave and death itself.—For we would not, brethren, says he, have you ignorant of our trouble, which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above our strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life;—but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in GOD, who raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver, and in whom we trust that he will still deliver us.

And indeed a stronger argument cannot be brought for future trust, than

the remembrance of past protection;—for what ground or reason can I have to distrust the kindness of that person, who has always been my friend and benefactor?

On whom can I better rely for assistance in the day of my distress, than on him who stood by me in all mine affliction?—and, when I was at the brink of destruction, delivered me out of all my troubles? Would it not be highly ungrateful, and reflect either upon his goodness or his sufficiency, to distrust that providence which has always had a watchful eye over me?—and who, according to his gracious promises, will never leave me, nor forsake me; and who, in all my wants, in all my emergencies, has been abundantly more willing to give, than I to ask it.—If the former and the latter rain have hitherto descended upon the earth in due season, and seed-time and harvest have never yet failed;—why should I fear famine in the land, or doubt, but that he who feedeth the raven, and providently ca-

tereth for the sparrow, should likewise be my comfort?—How unlikely is it that ever he should suffer his truth to fail?—This train of reflection, from the consideration of past mercies, is suitable and natural to all mankind:—there being no one, who by calling to mind God's kindnesses, which have been ever of old, but will see cause to apply the argument to himself.—

And though, in looking back upon the events which have befallen us, we are apt to attribute too much to the arm of flesh, in recounting the more successful parts of them; saying,—My wisdom, my parts, and address, extricated me from this misfortune;—my foresight and penetration saved me from a second;—my courage, and the mightiness of my strength, carried me through a third:—However we are accustomed to talk in this manner,—yet whoever coolly sits down and reflects upon the many accidents (though very improperly called so) which have befallen him in the course of his life,—when he considers

the many amazing turns in his favour, —sometimes in the most unpromising cases,—and often brought about by the most unlikely causes;—when he remembers the particular providences which have gone along with him,—the many personal deliverances which have preserved him,—the unaccountable manner in which he has been enabled to get through difficulties, which on all sides beset him, at one time of his life, or the strength of mind he found himself endowed with, to encounter afflictions which fell upon him at another period:—where is the man I say, who looks back with the least religious sense, upon what has thus happened to him, who could not give you sufficient proofs of God's power, and his arm over him, and recount several cases, wherein the God of Jacob was his help, and the Holy One of Israel his redeemer?

—Hast thou ever laid upon the bed of languishing, or laboured under a grievous distemper which threatened thy life? Call to mind thy sorrowful and pen-

five spirit at that time; and add to it, who it was that had mercy on thee, that brought thee out of darknes and the shadow of death, and made all thy bed in thy sickness.——

Hath the scantiness of thy condition hurried thee into great straits and difficulties, and brought thee almost to distraction?—Consider who it was that spread thy table in that wilderness of thought,—who was it made thy cup to overflow,—who added a friend of consolation to thee, and thereby spake peace to thy troubled mind.—Hast thou ever sustained any considerable damage in thy stock or trade?—Bethink thyself who it was that gave thee a serene and contented mind under those losses.—If thou hast recovered,—consider who it was that repaired those breaches,—when thy own skill and endeavours failed:—call to mind whose providence has blessed them since,—whose hand it was that has since set a hedge about thee, and made all that thou hast done to prosper.—Hast thou

ever been wounded in thy more tender part, through the loss of an obliging husband?—or hast thou been torn away from the embraces of a dear and promising child, by his unexpected death?—

O consider, whether the God of truth did not approve himself a father to thee, when fatherless,—or a husband to thee, when a widow,—and has either given thee a name better than of sons and daughters, or even beyond thy hope, made thy remaining tender branches to grow up tall and beautiful, like the cedars of Libanus.—

Strengthened by these considerations, suggesting the same or like past deliverances, either to thyself,—thy friends or acquaintance,—thou wilt learn this great lesson in the text, in all thy exigencies and distresses,—to trust God; and whatever befalls thee, in the many changes and chances of this mortal life, to speak comfort to thy soul, and to say in the words of Habakkuk the prophet, with which I conclude,—

Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; —although the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; —although the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet we will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation.

To whom be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXV.

EXODUS XXI. 14.

But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from my altar, that he may die.

As the end and happy result of society was our mutual protection from the depredations which malice and avarice lay us open to,—so have the laws of God laid proportionable restraints against such violations as would defeat us of such a security.—Of all other attacks which can be made against us,—that of a man's life which is his all,—being the greatest,—the offence, in God's dispensation to the Jews, was denounced as the most heinous,—and represented as most unpardonable.—At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.—Who so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.—Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer;

—he shall surely be put to death.—So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are,—for blood defileth the land;—and the land cannot be cleansed of blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.—For this reason, by the laws of all civilized nations, in all parts of the globe, it has been punished with death.—

Some civilized and wise communities have so far incorporated these severe dispensations into their municipal laws, as to allow of no distinction betwixt murder and homicide,—at least in the penalty:—leaving the intentions of the several parties concerned in it to that Being who knows the heart, and will adjust the differences of the case hereafter.—This falls, no doubt, heavy upon particulars—but it is urged for the benefit of the whole.—It is not the business of a preacher to enter into an examination of the grounds and reasons for so seeming a severity.—Where most severe,—they have proceeded, no doubt, from an excess of abhorrence of a crime,

—which is, of all others, most terrible and shocking in its own nature,—and the most direct attack and stroke at society;—as the security of a man's life was the first protection of society,—the groundwork of all the other blessings to be desired from such a compact.—Thefts,—oppressions,—exactions, and violences of that kind, cut off the branches;—this smote the root:—all perished with it:—the injury irreparable.—No after-act could make amends for it.—What recompence can he give to a man in exchange for his life?—What satisfaction to the widow,—the fatherless,—to the family,—the friends,—the relations,—cut off from his protection,—and rendered perhaps destitute,—perhaps miserable for ever!—

No wonder, that, by the law of nature,—this crime was always pursued with the most extreme vengeance;—which made the barbarians to judge, when they saw St. Paul upon the point of dying a sudden and terrifying death, —No doubt this man is a murderer;

who, though he has escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.—

The censure there was rash and uncharitable; but the honest detestation of the crime was uppermost.—They saw a dreadful punishment,—they thought;—and in seeing the one, they suspected the other.—And the vengeance which had overtaken the holy man, was meant by them the vengeance and punishment of the almighty Being, whose providence and honour was concerned in pursuing him, from the place he had fled from, to that island.

The honour and authority of God is most evidently struck at, most certainly, in every such crime,—and therefore he would pursue it;—it being the reason, in the ninth of Genesis, upon which the prohibition of murder is grounded;—for in the image of God created he man;—as if to attempt the life of a man had something in it peculiarly daring and audacious;—not only shocking as to its consequence above all other crimes, but of personal violence and

indignity against God, the author of our life and death.—That it is the highest act of injustice to man, and which will admit of no compensation,—I have said.—But the depriving a man of life, does not comprehend the whole of his suffering; he may be cut off in an unprovided or disordered condition, with regard to the great account betwixt himself and his Maker.—He may be under the power of irregular passions and desires.—The best of men are not always upon their guard.—And I am sure we have all reason to join in that affecting part of our Litany,—That amongst other evils,—God would deliver us from sudden death;—that we may have some fore-sight of that period to compose our spirits,—prepare our accounts,—and put ourselves in the best posture we can to meet it; for, after we are most prepared,—it is a terror to human nature.—

The people of some nations are said to have a peculiar art in poisoning by slow and gradual advances.—In this case,—however horrid,—it savours of mercy with regard to our spiritual state;

—for the sensible decays of nature, which a sufferer must feel within him from the secret workings of the horrid drug—give warning, and shew that mercy which the bloody hand that comes upon his neighbour suddenly, and slays him with guile,—has denied him.—It may serve to admonish him of the duty of repentance, and to make his peace with God, whilst he had time and opportunity.—The speedy execution of justice, which, as our laws now stand, and which were intended for that end,—must strike the greater terror upon that account.—Short as the interval between sentence and death is,—it is long, compared to the case of the murdered.—Thou allowedst the man no time,—said the judge to a late criminal, in a most affecting manner; thou allowedst him not a moment to prepare for eternity;—and to one who thinks at all,—it is, of all reflections and self-accusation, the most heavy and unsurmountable.—That by the hand of violence, a man in a perfect state of health,—whilst he walks out in perfect security, as he

thinks, with his friends;—perhaps whilst he is sleeping soundly,—to be hurried out of the world by the assassin,—by a sudden stroke,—to find himself at the bar of God's justice, without notice and preparation for his trial,—'tis most horrible!

Though he be really a good man, (and it is to be hoped God makes merciful allowances in such cases)—yet it is a terrifying consideration at the best;—and, as the injury is greater,—there are also very aggravating circumstances relating to the person who commits this act.—As when it is the effect not of a rash and sudden passion, which sometimes disorders and confounds reason for a moment,—but of a deliberate and propense design or malice.—When the sun not only goes down, but rises upon his wrath;—when he sleeps not—till he has struck the stroke;—when, after he has had time and leisure to recollect himself,—and consider what he is going to do;—when, after all the checks of conscience,—the struggles of humanity,—

the recoilings of his own blood, at the thoughts of shedding another man's—he shall persist still,—and resolve to do it.—Merciful God! protect us—from doing or suffering such evils.—Blessed be thy name and providence, which seldom or ever suffers it to escape with impunity.—In vain does the guilty flatter himself with hopes of secrecy or impunity: the eye of God is always upon him.—Whither can he fly from his presence!—By the immensity of his nature, he is present in all places:—by the infinity of it, to all times;—by his omniscience, to all thoughts, words, and actions of men.—By an emphatical phrase in Scripture, the blood of the innocent is said to cry to heaven from the ground for vengeance;—and it was for this reason, that he might be brought to justice,—that he was debarred the benefit of any asylum and the cities of refuge.—For the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood,—and their eye should not pity him.

The text says,—Thou shalt take him from my altar that he may die.—It had been a very ancient imagination, that for men guilty of this and other horrid crimes,—a place held sacred, as dedicated to GOD, was a refuge and protection to them from the hands of justice.—The law of GOD cuts the transgressor off from all delusive hopes of this kind;—and I think the Romish church has very little to boast of in the sanctuaries which she leaves open for this and other crimes and irregularities.—Sanctuaries which are often the first temptations to wickedness, and therefore bring the greater scandal and dishonour to her that authorises their pretensions.—

Every obstruction of the course of justice,—is a door opened to betray society, and bereave us of those blessings which it has in view.—To stand up for the privileges of such places, is to invite men to sin with a bribe of impunity.—It is a strange way of doing honour to GOD, to screen actions which are a disgrace to humanity.—

What Scripture and all civilized nations teach concerning the crime of taking away another man's life,—is applicable to the wickedness of a man's attempting to bereave himself of his own.—He has no more right over it,—than over that of others:—and whatever false glosses have been put upon it by men of bad heads or bad hearts,—it is at the bottom a complication of cowardice, and wickedness, and weakness;—is one of the fatalest mistakes desperation can hurry a man into;—inconsistent with all the reasoning and religion of the world, and irreconcilable with that patience under afflictions,—that resignation and submission to the will of God in all straits which is required of us.—But if our calamities are brought upon ourselves by a man's own wickedness,—still has he less to urge,—least reason has he to renounce the protection of God—when he most stands in need of it, and of his mercy.—

But as I intend the subject of self-murder for my discourse next Sunday,—

I shall not anticipate what I have to say, but proceed to consider some other cases, in which the law relating to the life of our neighbour is transgressed in different degrees.—All which are generally spoken of under the subject of murder,—and considered by the best casuists as a species of the same,—and in justice to the subject cannot be passed here.—

St. John says, Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer;—it is the first step to this sin;—and our Saviour, in his sermon upon the mount, has explained in how many slighter and unsuspected ways and degrees,—the command in the law,—Thou shalt do no murder, may be opposed, if not broken.—All real mischiefs and injuries maliciously brought upon a man, to the sorrow and disturbance of his mind,—eating out the comfort of his life, and shortening his days, are this sin in disguise;—and the grounds of the Scripture expressing it with such severity, is,—that the beginnings of wrath and malice,—in event, often extend to such great and unforeseen effects,

as, were we foretold them,—we should give so little credit to, as to say,—Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?—And though these beginnings do not necessarily produce the worst (God forbid they should), yet they cannot be committed without these evil seeds are first sown:—As Cain's causeless anger (as Dr. Clarke observes) against his brother;—to which the apostle alludes—ended in taking away his life;—and the best instructors teach us, that, to avoid a sin,—we must avoid the steps and temptations which lead to it.—

This should warn us to free our minds from all tincture of avarice, and desire after what is another man's.—It operates the same way,—and has terminated too oft in the same crime.—And it is the great excellency of the Christian religion,—that it has an eye to this in the stress laid upon the first springs of evils in the heart;—rendering us accountable not only for our words,—but the thoughts themselves,—if not checked in time,

but suffered to proceed further than the first motions of concupiscence.

Ye have heard, therefore, says our Saviour, that it was said by them of old time,—Thou shalt not kill;—but I say unto you,—whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment;—and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca,—shall be in danger of the council;—but whosoever shall say, “thou fool,”—shall be in danger of hell-fire.—The interpretation of which I shall give you in the words of a great scripturist, Dr. Clarke,—and is as follows:—That the three gradations of crimes are an allusion to the three different degrees of punishment, in the three courts of judicature amongst the Jews.—And our Saviour’s meaning was,—That every degree of sin, from its first conception to its outrage,—every degree of malice and hatred, shall receive from God a punishment proportionable to the offence.—Whereas the old law, according to the Jewish interpretation, extended not to these

things at all,—forbade only murder and outward injuries.—Whosoever shall say, “thou fool,” shall be in danger of hell-fire.—The sense of which is not that, in the strict and literal acceptation, every rash and passionate expression shall be punished with eternal damnation;—(for who then would be saved?)—but that at the exact account in the judgment of the great day, every secret thought and intent of the heart shall have its just estimation and weight in the degrees of punishment, which shall be assigned to every one in his final state.

There is another species of this crime which is seldom taken notice of in discourses upon the subject,—and yet can be reduced to no other class:—And that is, where the life of our neighbour is shortened,—and often taken away as directly as by a weapon, by the empirical sale of nostrums and quack medicines,—which ignorance and avarice blend.—The loud tongue of ignorance impudently promises much,—and the ear of the sick is open.—And as many of these

pretenders deal in edge tools, too many, I fear, perish with the misapplication of them.—

So great are the difficulties of tracing out the hidden causes of the evils to which this frame of ours is subject,—that the most candid of the profession have ever allowed and lamented how unavoidably they are in the dark.—So that the best medicines, administered with the wisest heads,—shall often do the mischief they were intended to prevent.—These are misfortunes to which we are subject in this state of darkness;—but when men without skill,—without education,—without knowledge either of the distemper, or even of what they sell,—make merchandize of the miserable,—and, from a dishonest principle,—trifle with the pains of the unfortunate,—too often with their lives,—and from the mere motive of a dishonest gain,—every such instance of a person bereft of life by the hand of ignorance, can be considered in no other light than a branch of the same root.—It is murder in the true sense;—which, though not

cognizable by our laws,—by the laws of right, every man's own mind and conscience must appear equally black and detestable.—

In doing what is wrong,—we stand chargeable with all the bad consequences which arise from the action, whether foreseen or not.—And as the principal view of the empiric in those cases is not what he always pretends,—the good of the public,—but the good of himself,—it makes the action what it is.—

Under this head, it may not be improper to comprehend all adulterations of medicines, wilfully made worse thro' avarice.—If a life is lost by such wilful adulterations,—and it may be affirmed, that, in many critical turns of an acute distemper, there is but a single cast left for the patient,—the trial and chance of a single drug in his behalf;—and if that has wilfully been adulterated and wilfully despoiled of its best virtues,—what will the vender answer?—

May God grant we may all answer well for ourselves, that we may be finally happy. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXVI.

Sanctity of the Apostles.

MATTHEW XI. 6.

Blessed is he, that shall not be offended in me.

THE general prejudices of the Jewish nation concerning the royal state and condition of the Saviour, who was to come into the world,—was a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, to the greatest part of that unhappy and prepossessed people, when the promise was actually fulfilled.—Whether it was altogether the traditions of their fathers, —or that the rapturous expressions of their prophets, which represented the Messiah's spiritual kingdom in such extent of power and dominion, misled them into it;—or that their own carnal expectations turned wilful interpreters upon them, inclining them to look for

nothing but the wealth and worldly grandeur which were to be acquired under their deliverer:—whether these,—or that the system of temporal blessings helped to cherish them in this gross and covetous expectation,—it was one of the great causes for their rejecting him.—“This fellow, we know not whence he is,”—was the popular cry of one part;—and they who seemed to know whence he was, scornfully turned it against him, by the repeated quere,—Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and of Juda and Simon?—and are not his sisters here with us?—And they were offended at him.—So that, though it was prepared by God to be the glory of his people Israel, yet the circumstances of humility, in which he was manifested, were thought a scandal to them.—Strange!—that he who was born their king,—should be born of no other virgin than Mary,—the meanest of their people;—(for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden)—and of one of the poorest too:—for she had

not a lamb to offer,—but was purified, as Moses directed in such a case, by the oblation of a turtle-dove;—that the Saviour of their nation, whom they expected to be ushered amidst them with all the ensigns and apparatus of royalty, should be brought forth in a stable, and answerable to distress;—subjected all his life to the lowest conditions of humanity:—that whilst he lived, he should not have a hole to put his head in, nor his corpse in, when he died;—but his grave too must be the gift of charity.—These were thwarting considerations to those who waited for the redemption of Israel, and looked for it in no other shape, than the accomplishment of those golden dreams of temporal power and sovereignty, which had filled their imaginations.—The ideas were not to be reconciled;—and so insuperable an obstacle was the prejudice on one side, to their belief on the other,—that it literally fell out, as Simeon prophetically declared of the Messiah,—that he was set forth for

the *fall*, as well as the rising again, of many in Israel.

This, though it was the cause of their infidelity,—was however no excuse for it.—For whatever their mistakes were, the miracles which were wrought in contradiction to them, brought conviction enough to leave them without excuse;—and besides, it was natural for them to have concluded, had their prepossessions given them leave,—that he who fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, could not want power to be great;—and therefore needed not to appear in the condition of poverty and meanness, had it not, on other scores, been more needful to confront the pride and vanity of the world,—and to shew his followers what the temper of christianity was, by the temper of its first institutor;—who, though they were offered, and he could have commanded them,—despised the glories of the world;—took upon him the form of a servant;—and, though equal with God,—yet made himself of

no reputation,—that he might settle, and be the example of, so holy and humble a religion, and thereby convince his disciples for ever, that neither his kingdom, nor their happiness, were to be of this world.—Thus the Jews might have easily argued;—but when there was nothing but reason to do it with on one side, and strong prejudices, backed with interest, to maintain the dispute, upon the other,—we do not find the point is always so easily determined.—Although the purity of our Saviour's doctrine, and the mighty works he wrought in its support, were demonstratively stronger arguments for his divinity, than the unrespected lowliness of his condition could be against it;—yet the prejudice continued strong;—they had been accustomed to temporal promises;—so bribed to do their duty,—they could not endure to think of a religion that would not promise, as much as Moses did, to fill their basket, and set them high above all nations:—a religion whose appearance was not great and splendid,—but looked thin

and meagre;—and whose principles and promises,—like the curses of their law,—called for sufferings, and promised persecutions.

If we take this key along with us through the New Testament, it will let us into the spirit and meaning of many of our Saviour's replies in his conferences with his disciples, and others of the Jews;—so particularly in this place, Matthew vi. when John had sent two of his disciples to enquire, Whether it was he that should come, or that they were to look for another?—Our Saviour, with a particular eye to this prejudice, and the general scandal he knew had risen against his religion upon this worldly account,—after a recital to the messengers of the many miracles he had wrought; as that—the blind received their sight,—the lame walked,—the lepers were cleansed,—the dead raised;—all which characters, with their benevolent ends, fully demonstrated him to be the Messiah that was promised them;—he closes up his answer to them with the words of the

text,—And blessed is he that shall not be offended in me;—blessed is the man whose upright and honest heart will not be blinded by worldly considerations, or hearken to his lusts and prepossessions in a truth of this moment.—The like benediction is recorded in the 7th chapter of St. Luke, and in the sixth of St. John;—when Peter broke out in that warm confession of their belief—Lord, we believe—we are sure that thou art Christ, the son of the living God.—The same benediction is uttered,—though couched in different words,—Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona;—for flesh and blood has not revealed it, but my Father which is in heaven.—Flesh and blood,—the natural workings of this carnal desire;—the lust and love of the world have had no hand in this conviction of thine;—but my Father, and the works which I have wrought in his name,—in vindication of this faith,—have established thee in it, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.—

This universal ruling principle, and almost invincible attachment to the interests and glories of the world, which we see first made so powerful a stand against the belief of christianity,—has continued to have as ill an effect, at least, upon the practice of it ever since;—and therefore there is no one point of wisdom, that is of nearer importance to us,—than to purify this gross appetite, and restrain it within bounds, by lowering our high conceit of the things of this life, and our concern for those advantages which misled the Jews.—To judge justly of the world,—we must stand at a due distance from it;—which will discover to us the vanity of its riches and honours, in such true dimensions, as will engage us to behave ourselves towards them with moderation.—This is all that is wanting to make us wise and good;—that we may be left to the full influence of religion;—to which christianity so far conduces, that it is the great blessing, the peculiar advantage we enjoy under

its institution, that—it affords us not only the most excellent precepts of this kind, but also it shews us those precepts confirmed by most excellent examples.—A heathen philosopher may talk very elegantly about despising the world, and, like Seneca, may prescribe very ingenious rules to teach us an art he never exercised himself:—for all the while he was writing in praise of poverty, he was enjoying a great estate, and endeavouring to make it greater.—But if ever we hope to reduce those rules to practice, it must be by the help of religion.—If we would find men who by their lives bore witness to their doctrines, we must look for them amongst the acts and monuments of our church,—amongst the first followers of their crucified Master; who spoke with authority, because they spoke experimentally, and took care to make their words good,—by despising the world, and voluntarily accounting all things in it loss, that they might win Christ.—O holy and blessed apostles!—blessed were ye indeed,—for ye conferred

not with flesh and blood,—for ye were not offended in him through any considerations of this world;—ye conferred not with flesh and blood, neither with its snares and temptations.—Neither the pleasures of life or the pains of death laid hold upon your faith, to make you fall from him.—Ye had your prejudices of worldly grandeur in common with the rest of your nation;—saw, like them, your expectations blasted;—but ye gave them up, as men governed by reason and truth.—As ye surrendered all your hopes in this world to your faith with fortitude,—so did ye meet the terrors of the world with the same temper.—Neither the frowns and discountenance of the civil powers,—neither tribulation, or distress, or persecution,—or cold,—or nakedness,—or famine,—or the sword, could separate you from the love of Christ.—Ye took up your crosses cheerfully, and followed him;—followed the same rugged way—trode the wine-press after him;—voluntarily submitting yourselves to poverty,—to punishment,—to

the scorn and the reproaches of the world, which ye knew were to be the portion of all of you who engaged in preaching a mystery so spoken against by the world;—so unpalatable to all its passions and pleasures,—and so irreconcilable to the pride of human reason.—So that ye were, as one of ye expressed, and all of ye experimentally found, though ye were made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things, upon this account;—yet ye went on as zealously as ye set out.—Ye were not offended, nor ashamed of the gospel of Christ;—wherefore should ye?—The impostor and hypocrite might have been ashamed;—the guilty would have found cause for it;—ye had no cause,—though ye had temptation.—Ye preached *but what ye knew*, and your honest and upright hearts gave evidence,—the strongest,—to the truth of it;—for ye left all,—ye suffered all,—ye gave all that your sincerity had left you to give. Ye gave your lives at last as pledges and confirmations of your faith and warmest affec-

tion for your Lord.—Holy and blessed men!—ye gave all,—when, alas! our cold and frozen affection will part with nothing for his sake, not even with our vices and follies, which are worse than nothing;—for they are vanity, and misery, and death.—

The state of christianity calls not now for such evidences, as the apostles gave of their attachment to it.—We have, literally speaking, neither houses nor lands, nor possessions to forsake;—we have neither wives or children, or brethren or sisters, to be torn from;—no rational pleasure—or natural endearments to give up.—We have nothing to part with,—but what is not our interest to keep,—our lusts and passions.—We have nothing to do for Christ's sake—but what is most for our own;—that is,—to be temperate, and chaste, and just,—and peaceable,—and charitable,—and kind to one another.—So that if man could suppose himself in a capacity even of capitulating with God, concerning the terms upon which he

would submit to his government;—and to chuse the laws he would be bound to observe in testimony of his faith;—it were impossible for him to make any proposals which, upon all accounts, should be more advantageous to his interests, than those very conditions to which we are already obliged; that is, to deny ourselves ungodliness, to live soberly and righteously in this present life, and lay such restraints upon our appetites as are for the honour of human nature,—the improvement of our happiness,—our health,—our peace,—our reputation and safety.—When one considers this representation of the temporal inducements of christianity,—and compares it with the difficulties and discouragements which they encountered who first made profession of a persecuted and hated religion;—at the same time that it raises the idea of the fortitude and sanctity of these holy men, of whom the world is not worthy,—it sadly diminishes that of ourselves,—which, though it has all the blessings of this

life apparently on its side to support it—yet can scarce be kept alive;—and if we may form a judgment from the little stock of religion which is left,—should God ever exact the same trials,—unless we greatly alter for the better,—or there should prove some secret charm in persecution, which we know not of.—It is much to be doubted, if the Son of man should make this proof,—of this generation,—whether there would be found faith upon the earth.

As this argument may convince us,—so let it shame us into virtue,—that the admirable examples of those holy men may not be left us, or commemorated by us to no end;—but rather that they may answer the pious purpose of their institution,—to conform our lives to theirs,—that with them we may be partakers of a glorious inheritance, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXVII.

Penances.

I JOHN V. 3.

And his commandments are not grievous.

No,—they are not grievous, my dear auditors.—Amongst the many prejudices which at one time or other have been conceived against our holy religion, there is scarce any one which has done more dishonour to christianity, or which has been more opposite to the spirit of the gospel, than this, in express contradiction to the words of the text, “That the commandments of God *are* grievous.”—That the way which leads to life is not only strait, for that our Saviour tells us, and that with much tribulation we shall seek it;—but that christians are bound to make the worst of it, and tread it barefoot upon thorns

and briers,—if ever they expect to arrive happily at their journey's end.— And in course,—during this disastrous pilgrimage, it is our duty so to renounce the world, and abstract ourselves from it, as neither to interfere with its interests, or taste any of the pleasures, or any of the enjoyments of this life.—

Nor has this been confined merely to speculation, but has frequently been extended to practice, as is plain, not only from the lives of many legendary saints and hermits,—whose chief commendation seems to have been, “That they fled unnaturally from all commerce with their fellow-creatures, and then mortified, and piously—half starved themselves to death;”—but likewise from the many austere and fantastic orders which we see in the Romish church, which have all owed their origin and establishment to the same idle and extravagant opinion.

Nor is it to be doubted, but the affectation of something like it in our Methodists, when they descant upon the

necessity of alienating themselves from the world, and selling all that they have, —is not to be ascribed to the same mistaken enthusiastic principle, which would cast so black a shade upon religion, as if the kind Author of it had created us on purpose to go mourning, all our lives long, in sack-cloth and ashes,—and sent us into the world, as so many faint-errants, in quest of adventures full of sorrow and affliction.

Strange force of enthusiasm!—and yet not altogether unaccountable.—For what opinion was there ever so odd, or action so extravagant, which has not, at one time or other, been produced by ignorance, —conceit, —melancholy; —a mixture of devotion, with an ill concurrence of air and diet, operating together in the same person.—When the minds of men happen to be thus unfortunately prepared, whatever groundless doctrine rises up, and settles itself strongly upon their fancies, has generally the ill-luck to be interpreted as an illumination from the spirit of God;—and

whatever strange action they find in themselves a strong inclination to do,—that impulse is concluded to be a call from heaven; and consequently,—that they cannot err in executing it.—

If this, or some such account, was not to be admitted, how is it possible to be conceived that christianity, which breathed out nothing but peace and comfort to mankind, which professedly took off the severities of the Jewish law, and was given us in the spirit of meekness, to ease our shoulders of a burden which was too heavy for us:—that this religion, so kindly calculated for the ease and tranquillity of man, which enjoins nothing but what is suitable to his nature, should be so misunderstood:—or that it should ever be supposed,—that he who is infinitely happy, could envy us our enjoyments;—or that a Being infinitely kind, would grudge a mournful passenger a little rest and refreshment, to support his spirits through a weary pilgrimage;—or that he should call him to an account here-

after, because, in his way, he had hastily snatched at some fugacious and innocent pleasures, till he was suffered to take up his final repose.—This is no improbable account, and the many invitations we find in Scripture to a grateful enjoyment of the blessings and advantages of life, make it evident.—The apostle tells us in the text,—That God's commandments are not grievous.—He has pleasure in the prosperity of his people, and wills not that they should turn tyrants and executioners upon their minds or bodies, and inflict pains and penalties on them to no end or purpose :—That he has proposed peace and plenty, joy and victory, as the encouragement and portion of his servants ; thereby instructing us,—that our virtue is not necessarily endangered by the fruition of outward things ;—but that temporal blessings and advantages, instead of extinguishing, more naturally kindle our love and gratitude to God, before whom it is no way inconsistent both to worship and rejoice.

If this was not so, why, you'll say, does GOD seem to have made such provision for our happiness?—Why has he given us so many powers and faculties for enjoyment, and adapted so many objects to gratify and entertain them?—Some of which he has created so fair,—with such wonderful beauty, and has formed them so exquisitely for this end,—that they have power, for a time, to charm away the sense of pain,—to cheer up the dejected heart under poverty and sickness, and make it go and remember its miseries no more.—Can all this, you'll say, be reconciled to GOD's wisdom, which does nothing in vain;—or can it be accounted for on any other supposition, but that the author of our being, who has given us all things richly to enjoy, wills us a comfortable existence even *here*, and seems moreover so evidently to have ordered things with a view to this, that the ways which lead to our future happiness, when rightly understood, he has made to be ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace?

From this representation of things we are led to this demonstrative truth, then, that God never intended to debar man of pleasures, under certain limitations.

Travellers, on a business of the last and most important concern, may be allowed to please their eyes with the natural and artificial beauties of the country they are passing through, without reproach of forgetting the main errand they were sent upon;—and if they are not led out of their road by variety of prospects, edifices, and ruins, would it not be a senseless piece of severity to shut their eyes against such gratifications? —*For who has required such service at their hands?*

The humouring of certain appetites, where morality is not concerned, seems to be the means by which the Author of nature intended to sweeten this journey of life,—and bear us up under the many shocks and hard jostlings, which we are sure to meet with in our way. —And a man might, with as much

reason, muffle up himself against sunshine and fair weather,—and at other times expose himself naked to the inclemencies of cold and rain, as debar himself of the innocent delights of his nature, for affected reserve and melancholy.

It is true, on the other hand, our passions are apt to grow upon us by indulgence, and become exorbitant, if they are not kept under exact discipline, that by way of caution and prevention, 'twere better, at certain times, to affect some degree of needless reserve, than hazard any ill consequences from the other extreme.

But when almost the whole of religion is made to consist in the pious fooleries of penances and sufferings, as is practised in the church of Rome (did no other evil attend it), yet, since it is putting religion upon a wrong scent, placing it more in these than in inward purity and integrity of heart, one cannot guard too much against this, as well as all other such abuses of reli-

gion, as make it to consist in something which it ought not.—How such mockery became a part of religion at first, or upon what motives they were imagined to be services acceptable to God, is hard to give a better account of than what was hinted above;—namely,—that men of melancholy and morose tempers, conceiving the Deity to be like themselves, a gloomy, discontented, and sorrowful being,—believed he delighted, as they did, in splenetic and mortifying actions, and therefore made their religious worship to consist of chimeras as wild and barbarous as their own dreams and vapours.

What ignorance and enthusiasm at first introduced,—now tyranny and imposture continue to support.—So that the political improvement of these delusions to the purposes of wealth and power, is made one of the strongest pillars which upholds the Romish religion;—which, with all its pretences to a more strict mortification and sanctity, —when you examine it minutely, is

little else than a mere pecuniary contrivance—And the truest definition you can give of popery—is,—that it is a system put together and contrived to operate upon men's weaknesses and passions,—and thereby to pick their pockets,—and leave them in a fit condition for its arbitrary designs.

And indeed that church has not been wanting in gratitude for the good offices of this kind, which the doctrine of penances has done them; for, in consideration of its services,—they have raised it above the level of moral duties,—and have at length complimented it into the number of their sacraments, and made it a necessary point of salvation.

By these, and other tenets, no less politic and inquisitional,—popery has found out the art of making men miserable in spite of their senses, and the plenty with which God has blessed them.

So that in many countries where popery reigns,—but especially in that part

of Italy where she has raised her throne, —though, by the happiness of its soil and climate, it is capable of producing as great variety and abundance as any country upon earth;—yet so successful have its spiritual directors been in the management and retail of these blessings,—that they have found means to allay, if not entirely to defeat, them all, by one pretence or other.—Some bitterness is officiously squeezed into every man's cup for his soul's health, till, at length, the whole intention of nature and providence is destroyed.—It is not surprising, that where such unnatural severities are practised and heightened by other hardships,—the most fruitful land should be barren, and wear a face of poverty and desolation;—or that many thousands, as have been observed, should fly from the rigours of such a government, and seek shelter rather amongst rocks and deserts, than lie at the mercy of so many unreasonable task-makers, under whom they can hope for no other reward of their indus-

try,—but rigorous slavery, made still worse by the tortures of unnecessary mortifications.—*I say unnecessary*,—because where there is a virtuous and good end proposed from any sober instances of self-denial and mortification,—God forbid we should call them unnecessary, or that we should dispute against a thing—from the abuse to which it has been put ;—and, therefore, what is said in general upon this head, will be understood to reach no farther than where the practice is become a mixture of fraud and tyranny, but will no ways be interpreted to extend to those self-denials which the discipline of our holy church directs at this solemn season ; which have been introduced by reason and good sense at first, and have since been applied to serve no purposes,—but those of religion :—these, by restraining our appetites for a while, and withdrawing our thoughts from grosser objects,—do, by a mechanical effect, dispose us for cool and sober reflections, incline us to turn our eyes inwards up-

on ourselves, and consider what we are,—and what we have been doing;—for what intent we were sent into the world, and what kind of characters we were designed to act in it.

It is necessary that the mind of man, at some certain periods, should be prepared to enter into this account; and without some such discipline, to check the insolence of unrestrained appetites, and call home the conscience,—the soul of man, capable as it is of brightness and perfection, would sink down to the lowest depths of darkness and brutality.—However true this is,—there still appears no obligation to renounce the innocent delights of our beings, or to affect a sullen distaste against them.—Nor, in truth,—can even the supposition of it be well admitted:—for pleasures arising from the free and natural exercise of the faculties of the mind and body, to talk them down, is like talking against the frame and mechanism of human nature, and would be no less senseless than the disputing

against the burning of fire, or falling downwards of a stone.—Besides this,—man is so contrived, that he stands in need of frequent repairs;—both mind and body are apt to sink and grow unactive under long and close attention;—and, therefore, must be restored by proper recruits.—Some part of our time may doubtless innocently and lawfully be employed in actions merely diverting;—and whenever such indulgencies become criminal, it is seldom the nature of the actions themselves,—but the excess which makes them so.

But some one may here ask,—By what rule are we to judge of excess in these cases?—If the enjoyment of the same sort of pleasures may be either innocent or guilty, according to the use or abuse of them,—how shall we be certified where the boundaries lie?—or be speculative enough to know how far we may go with safety?—I answer, there are very few who are not casuists enough to make a right judgment in this point.—For since one principal reason, why

God may be supposed to allow pleasure in this world, seems to be for the refreshment and recruit of our souls and bodies, which, like clocks; must be wound up at certain intervals,—every man understands so much of the frame and mechanism of himself, to know how and when to unbend himself with such relaxations as are necessary to regain his natural vigour and cheerfulness, without which it is impossible he should either be in a disposition or capacity to discharge the several duties of his life.—Here then the partition becomes visible.

Whenever we pay this tribute to our appetites, any further than is sufficient for the purposes for which it was first granted,—the action proportionably loses some share of its innocence.—The surplusage of what is unnecessarily spent on such occasions, is so much of the little portion of our time negligently squandered, which, in prudence, we should apply better; because it was allotted us for more important uses, and

a different account will be required of it at our hands hereafter.

For this reason, does it not evidently follow,—that many actions and pursuits, which are irreproachable in their own natures, may be rendered blameable and vicious, from this single consideration, “That they have made us wasteful of the moments of this short and uncertain fragment of life, which should be almost one of our last prodigalities, since of them all, the least retrievable.”

—Yet how often is diversion, instead of amusement and relaxation, made the art and business of life itself?

—Look round,—what policy and contrivance is every day put in practice, for pre-engaging every day in the week, and parcelling out every hour of the day for one idleness or another,—for doing nothing,—or something worse than nothing;—and that with so much ingenuity, as scarce to leave a minute upon their hands to reproach them.—Though we all complain of the shortness of life,—yet how many people

seem quite overstocked with the days and hours of it, and are continually sending out into the highways and streets of the city for guests to come and take it off their hands.—If some of the more distressful objects of this kind were to sit down, and write a bill of their time, though partial as that of the unjust steward,—when they found in reality, that the whole sum of it, for many years, amounted to little more than this,—that they had rose up to eat,—to drink,—to play,—and had laid down again, merely because they were fit for nothing else:—when they looked back and beheld this fair space, capable of such heavenly improvements,—all scrawled over and defaced with a succession of so many unmeaning cyphers,—good GOD!—how would they be ashamed and confounded at the account!

With what reflections will they be able to support themselves in the decline of a life so miserably cast away,—should it happen, as it sometimes

does,—that they have stood idle even unto the eleventh hour?—We have not always power, and are not always in a temper, to impose upon ourselves.—When the edge of appetite is worn down, and the spirits of youthful days are cooled, which hurried us on in a circle of pleasure and impertinence,—then reason and reflection will have the weight which they deserve;—afflictions, or the bed of sickness, will supply the place of conscience;—and if they should fail,—old age will overtake us at last,—and shew us the past pursuits of life,—and force us to look upon them in their true point of view.—If there is any thing more to cast a cloud upon so melancholy a prospect as this shews us,—it is surely the difficulty and hazard of having all the work of the day to perform in the last hour;—of making an atonement to God, when we have no sacrifice to offer him, but the dregs and infirmities of those days, when we could have no pleasure in them.

How far GOD may be pleased to accept such late and imperfect services, is beyond the intention of this discourse.—Whatever stress some may lay upon it,—a death-bed repentance is but a weak and slender plank to trust our all upon.—Such as it is;—to that,—and GOD's infinite mercies, we commit them, who will not employ that time and opportunity he has given to provide a better security.

That we may all make a right use of the time allotted us,—GOD grant through the merits of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED

S E R M O N XXXVIII.

On Enthusiasm.

ST. JOHN XV. 5.

—For without me, ye can do nothing.

OUR Saviour, in the former part of the verse, having told his disciples, —That he was the vine, and that they were only branches;—intimating, in what a degree their good fruits, as well as the success of all their endeavours, were to depend upon his communications with them;—he closes the illustration with the inference from it, in the words of the text,—For without me, ye can do nothing.—In the 11th chapter to the Romans, where the manner is explained in which a christian stands by faith,—there is a like illustration made use of, and probably with an eye to this,—where St. Paul instructs us,—that a good man

stands as the branch of a wild olive does when it is grafted into a good olive-tree;—and that is,—it flourishes not through its own virtue, but in virtue of the root,—and such a root as is naturally not its own.

It is very remarkable in that passage,—that the apostle calls a bad man a wild olive-tree;—not barely a branch (as in the other case), but a tree, which, having a root of its own, supports itself, and stands in its own strength, and brings forth its own fruit.—And so does every bad man in respect of the wild and sour fruit of a vicious and corrupt heart.—According to the resemblance,—if the apostle intended it,—he is a tree,—has a root of his own,—and fruitfulness, such as it is, with a power to bring it forth without help. But in respect of religion, and the moral improvements of virtue and goodness,—the apostle calls us, and reason tells us, we are no more than a branch; and all our fruitfulness, and all our support,—depend so much upon the influence and communications

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of God,—that without him we can do nothing,—as our Saviour declares in the text.—There is scarce any point in our religion wherein men have run into such violent extremes as in the senses given to this, and such-like declarations in Scripture,—of our sufficiency being of God;—some understanding them so, as to leave no meaning at all in them;—others,—too much:—the one interpreting the gifts and influences of the spirit, so as to destroy the truth of all such promises and declarations in the gospel;—the other carrying their notions of them so high, as to destroy the reason of the gospel itself,—and render the christian religion, which consists of sober and consistent doctrines,—the most intoxicated,—the most wild and unintelligible institution that ever was in the world.

This being premised, I know not how I can more seasonably engage your attention this day, than by a short examination of each of these errors;—in doing which, as I shall take some pains to reduce both the extremes of them to

reason,—it will necessarily lead me, at the same time, to mark the safe and true doctrine of our church, concerning the promised influences and operations of the spirit of God upon our hearts;—which, however depreciated through the first mistake,—or boasted of beyond measure through the second,—must nevertheless be so limited and understood,—as, on one hand, to make the gospel of Christ consistent with itself,—and, on the other, to make it consistent with reason and common sense.

If we consider the many express declarations, wherein our Saviour tells his followers, before his crucifixion,—That God would send his spirit the Comforter amongst them, to supply his place in their hearts;—and, as in the text,—that without him, they could do nothing:—if we conceive them as spoken to his disciples, with an immediate view to the emergencies they were under, from their *natural* incapacities of finishing the great work he had left them, and building upon that large foundation he had laid,—

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without some extraordinary help and guidance to carry them through,—no one can dispute that evidence and confirmation which was after given of its truth ;—as our Lord's disciples were illiterate men, consequently unskilled in the arts and acquired ways of persuasion.—Unless this want had been supplied,—the first obstacle to their labours must have discouraged and put an end to them for ever.—As they had no language but their own, without the gift of tongues they could not have preached the gospel except in Judæa ;—and as they had no authority of their own,—without the supernatural one of signs and wonders,—they could not vouch for the truth of it beyond the limits where it was first transacted.—In this work, doubtless, all their sufficiency and power of acting was immediately from God ;—his holy spirit, as he had promised them, so it gave them a mouth and wisdom which all their adversaries were not able to gainsay or resist.—So that without him,—without these extraordinary gifts, in the most

literal sense of the words, they *could* do nothing.—But besides this plain application of the text to those particular persons and times, when God's spirit was poured down in that signal manner held sacred to this day,—there is something in them to be extended further, which christians of all ages,—and, I hope, of all denominations, have still a claim and trust in,—and that is, the ordinary assistance and influences of the spirit of God in our hearts, for moral and virtuous improvements;—these, both in their natures as well as intentions, being altogether different from the others above-mentioned conferred upon the disciples of our Lord.—The one were miraculous gifts,—in which the endowed person contributed nothing, which advanced human nature above itself, and raised all its projectile springs above their fountains; enabling them to speak and act such things, and in such manner, as was impossible for men not inspired and preternaturally upheld.—In the other case, the helps spoken of were the influences

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of God's spirit, which upheld us from falling below the dignity of our nature:—that divine assistance which graciously kept us from falling, and enabled us to perform the holy professions of our religion.—Though these are equally called spiritual gifts,—they are not, as in the first case, the entire works of the spirit, —but the calm co-operations of it with our own endeavours; and are ordinarily what every sincere and well-disposed christian has reason to pray for, and expect from the same fountain of strength, —who has promised to give his holy spirit to them that ask it.

From this point, which is the true doctrine of our church,—the two parties begin to divide both from it and each other;—each of them equally misapplying these passages of Scripture, and wresting them to extremes equally pernicious.—

To begin with the first; of whom, should you enquire the explanation and meaning of this or of other texts,—wherein the assistance of God's grace

and holy spirit is implied as necessary to sanctify our nature, and enable us to serve and please God?—They will answer,—That no doubt all our parts and abilities are the gifts of God,—who is the original author of our nature,—and, of consequence, of all that belongs thereto. *That as by him we live, and move, and have our being,*—we must in course depend upon him for all our actions whatsoever,—since we must depend upon him even for our life, and for every moment of its continuance.—That from this view of our state and natural dependence, it is certain they will say,—We can do nothing without his help.—But then they will add,—that it concerns us no farther as *christians*, than as we are *men*;—the sanctity of our lives, the religious habits and improvements of our hearts, in no other sense depending upon God, than the most indifferent of our actions, or the natural exercise of any of the other powers he has given us.—Agreeably with this,—that the spiritual gifts spoken of in Scripture, are to be

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understood by way of accommodation, to signify the natural or acquired gifts of a man's mind; such as memory, fancy, wit, and eloquence; which, in a strict and philosophical sense, may be called spiritual;—because they transcend the mechanical powers of matter,—and proceed more or less from the rational soul, which is a spiritual substance.

Whether these ought, in propriety, to be called spiritual gifts, I shall not contend, as it seems a mere dispute about words;—but it is enough that the interpretation cuts the knot, instead of untying it; and besides, explains away all kind of meaning in the above promises.—And the error of them seems to arise, in the first place, from not distinguishing that these spiritual gifts,—if they must be called so,—such as memory, fancy, and wit, and other endowments of the mind, which are known by the name of natural parts, belong merely to us as men;—and whether the different degrees, by which we excel each other in them, arise from a natural difference of our

souls,—or a happier disposition of the organical parts of us.—They are such, however, as GOD originally bestows upon us, and with which, in a great measure, we are sent into the world. But the moral gifts of the Holy Ghost,—which are more commonly called the fruits of the spirit,—cannot be confined within this description.—We come not into the world equipt with virtues, as we do with talents;—if we did, we should come into the world with that which robbed virtue of its best title both to present commendation and future reward.—The gift of continency depends not, as these affirm, upon a mere coldness of the constitution—or patience and humility from an insensibility of it;—but they are virtues insensibly wrought in us by the endeavours of our own wills and concurrent influences of a gracious agent;—and the religious improvements arising from thence, are so far from being the effects of nature, and a fit disposition of the several parts and organical powers given us,—that the contrary is true;—namely,

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—that the stream of our affections and appetites but too naturally carries us the other way.—For this, let any man lay his hand upon his heart, and reflect what has passed within him, in the several conflicts of meekness,—temperance,—chastity, and other self-denials,—and he will need no better argument for his conviction.—

This hint leads to the true answer to the above misinterpretation of the text, —That we depend upon God in no other sense for our virtues,—than we necessarily do for every thing else; and that the fruits of the spirit are merely the determinations and efforts of our own reason,—and as much our own accomplishments, as any other improvements are the effect of our own diligence and industry.

This account, by the way, is opposite to the apostle's—who tells us,—It is God that worketh in us both to do and will, of his good pleasure.—It is true, —though we are born ignorant,—we can make ourselves skilful;—we can acquire

arts and sciences by our own application and study.—But the case is not the same in respect of goodness.—We can acquire arts and sciences, because we lie under no natural indisposition or backwardness to that acquirement.—For nature, tho' it be corrupt, yet still it is curious and busy after knowledge.—But it does not appear, that to goodness and sanctity of manners we have the same natural propensity.—Lusts within, and temptations without, set up so strong a confederacy against it, as we are never able to surmount by our own strength.—However firmly we may think we stand,—the best of us are but upheld, and graciously kept upright; and whenever this divine assistance is withdrawn,—or suspended,—all history, especially the sacred, is full of melancholy instances of what man is, when God leaves him to himself,—that he is even a thing of nought.

Whether it was from a conscious experience of this truth in themselves,—or some traditions handed from the Scripture account of it;—or that it was, in

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some measure, deducible from the principles of reason,—in the writings of some of the wisest of the heathen philosophers, we find the strongest traces of the persuasion of God's assisting men to virtue and probity of manners.—One of the greatest masters of reasoning amongst the ancients acknowledges, that nothing great and exalted can be achieved, *sine divino afflatu*;—and Seneca, to the same purpose, *nulla mens bona sine Deo*;—that no soul can be good without divine assistance.—Now whatever comments may be put upon such passages in their writings,—it is certain those in Scripture can receive no other to be consistent with themselves, than what has been given.—And though, in vindication of human liberty, it is as certain on the other hand,—that education, precepts, examples, pious inclinations, and practical diligence, are great and meritorious advances towards a religious state;—yet the state itself is got and finished by God's grace; and the concurrence of his spirit upon tempers thus happily pre-

disposed,—and honestly making use of such fit means:—and unless thus much is understood from them,—the several expressions in Scripture, where the offices of the Holy Ghost conducive to this end, are enumerated;—such as cleansing, guiding, renewing, comforting, strengthening and establishing us,—are a set of unintelligible words, which may amuse, but can convey little light to the understanding.

This is all I have time left to say at present upon the first error of those, who, by too loose an interpretation of the gifts and fruits of the spirit, explain away the whole sense and meaning of them, and thereby render not only the promises, but the comforts of them too, of none effect.—Concerning which error, I have only to add this by way of extenuation of it,—that I believe the great and unedifying rout made about sanctification and regeneration in the middle of the last century, —and the enthusiastic extravagances into which the communications of the

spirit have been carried by so many deluded or deluding people in this, are two of the great causes which have driven many a sober man into the opposite extreme, against which I have argued.—Now if the dread of favouring too much of religion in their interpretations has done this ill service,—let us inquire, on the other hand, whether the affectation of too *much* religion in the other extreme, has not misled others full as far from truth, and further from the reason and sobriety of the gospel, than the first.

I have already proved by Scripture arguments, that the influence of the holy spirit of God is necessary to render the imperfect sacrifice of our obedience pleasing to our Maker.—He hath promised to *perfect his strength in our weakness*.—With this assurance we ought to be satisfied;—especially since our Saviour hath thought proper to mortify all scrupulous inquiries into operations of this kind, by comparing them to the wind, *which bloweth where it listeth; and*

*thou bearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth:—so is every one that is born of the spirit.—*Let humble gratitude acknowledge the effect, unprompted by an idle curiosity to explain the cause.

We are told, without this assistance, we can do nothing;—we are told, from the same authority, we can do all through Christ that strengthens us.—We are commanded to *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*. The reason immediately follows; *for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.*—From these, and many other repeated passages, it is evident, that the assistances of grace were not intended to destroy, but to co-operate with the endeavours of man, —and are derived from GOD, in the same manner as all natural powers.—Indeed, without this interpretation, how could the Almighty address himself to man as a rational being?—how could his actions be his own?—how could he be considered as a blameable or rewardable creature?

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From this account of the consistent opinions of a sober-minded christian, let us take a view of the mistaken enthusiast.—See him, ostentatiously clothed with the outward garb of sanctity, to attract the eyes of the vulgar.—See a cheerful demeanour, the natural result of an easy and self-applauding heart, studiously avoided as criminal.—See his countenance overspread with a melancholy gloom and despondence;—as if religion, which is evidently calculated to make us happy in this life as well as the next, was the parent of fullness and discontent.—Hear him pouring forth his pharisaical ejaculations on his journey, or in the streets.—Hear him boasting of extraordinary communications with the GOD of all knowledge, and at the same time offending against the common rules of his own native language, and the plainer dictates of common sense.—Hear him arrogantly thanking his GOD, that he is not as other men are; and, with more than papal uncharitableness, very liberally

allotting the portion of the damned, to every christian whom he, partial judge, deems less perfect than himself—to every christian who is walking on in the paths of duty with sober vigilance, aspiring to perfection by progressive attainments, and seriously endeavouring, through a rational faith in his Redeemer, to make his calling and election sure.

There have been no sects in the christian world, however absurd, which have not endeavoured to support their opinions by arguments drawn from Scripture, misinterpreted or misapplied.

We had a melancholy instance of this in our own country, in the last century,—when the church of Christ, as well as the government, during that period of national confusion, was torn asunder into various sects and factions;—when some men pretended to have Scripture precepts, parables, or prophecies to plead, in favour of the most impious absurdities that falsehood could advance. The same spirit which pre-

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vailed amongst the fanatics, seems to have gone forth among these modern enthusiasts.—Faith, the distinguishing characteristic of a christian, is defined by them not as a rational assent of the understanding, to truths which are established by indisputable authority, but as a violent persuasion of mind, that they are instantaneously become the children of God—that the whole score of their sins is for ever blotted out, without the payment of one tear of repentance.—Pleasing doctrine this to the fears and passions of mankind!—promising fair to gain proselytes of the vicious and impenitent.

Pardons and indulgences are the great support of papal power;—but these modern empirics in religion have improved upon the scheme, pretending to have discovered an infallible nostrum for all incurables;—such as will preserve them for ever.—And notwithstanding we have instances of notorious offenders among the warmest advocates for sinless perfection,—the charm continues

powerful.—Did these visionary notions of an heated imagination tend only to amuse the fancy, they might be treated with contempt;—but when they depreciate all moral attainments;—when the suggestions of a frantic brain are blasphemously ascribed to the holy spirit of God;—when faith and divine love are placed in opposition to practical virtues, they then become the objects of aversion. In one sense, indeed, many of these deluded people demand our tenderest compassion,—whose disorder is in the head rather than the heart: and who call for the aid of a physician who can cure the distempered state of the body, rather than one who may soothe the anxieties of the mind.

Indeed, in many cases, they seem so much above the skill of either,—that unless God in his mercy rebuke this spirit of enthusiasm, which is gone out amongst us, no one can pretend to say how far it may go, or what mischiefs it may do in these kingdoms.—Already it has taught us as much blasphemous

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language ;—and, if it goes on, by the samples given us in their journals, will fill us with as many legendary accounts of visions and revelations, as we have formerly had from the church of Rome. And for any security we have against it, —when time shall serve, it may as effectually convert the professors of it, even into popery itself,—consistent with their own principles;—for they have nothing more to do than to say, that the spirit which inspired them, has signified, that the pope is inspired as well as they,—and consequently is infallible. —After which I cannot see how they can possibly refrain going to mass, consistent with their own principles.—

Thus much for these two opposite errors ;—the examination of which has taken up so much time,—that I have little left to add, but to beg of God, by the assistance of his holy spirit, to preserve us equally from both extremes, and enable us to form such right and worthy apprehensions of our holy religion,—that it may never suffer, through

the coolness of our conceptions of it, on one hand,—or the immoderate heat of them, on the other;—but that we may at all times see it, as it is, and as it was designed by its blessed Founder, as the most rational, sober, and consistent institution that could have been given to the sons of men.

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S E R M O N XXXIX.

Eternal Advantages of Religion.

ECCLESIASTES XII. 13.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter,—Fear
 GOD, and keep his commandments: for this is the
 whole duty of man.

THE wise man, in the beginning of
 this book, had proposed it as a
 grand query to be discussed,—*To find
 out what was good for the sons of men,
 which they should do under the heavens, all
 the days of their lives:—*That is, what
 was the fittest employment, and the
 chief and proper business, which they
 should apply themselves to in this world.
 —And here, in the text, after a fair dis-
 cussion of the question, he asserts it to
 be the business of religion,—the fearing
 GOD, and keeping his commandments.
 —This was the conclusion of the whole

matter,—and the natural result of all his debates and inquiries.—And I am persuaded, the more observations we make upon the short life of man,—the more we experience,—and the longer trials we have of the world,—and the several pretensions it offers to our happiness,—the more we shall be engaged to think, like him,—that we can never find what we look for in any other thing which we do under the heavens, except in that of duty and obedience to God.—In the course of the wise man's examination of this point,—we find a great many beautiful reflections upon human affairs, all tending to illustrate the conclusion he draws; and as they are such as are apt to offer themselves to the thoughts of every serious and considerate man,—I cannot do better than renew the impressions,—by retouching the principal arguments of his discourse—before I proceed to the general use and application of the whole.

In the former part of his book he had taken into his consideration those several

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states of life to which men usually apply themselves for happiness;—first, learning,—wisdom;—next,—mirth, jollity, and pleasure;—then power and greatness,—riches and possessions.—All of which are so far from answering the end for which they were at first pursued,—that, by a great variety of arguments,—he proves them severally to be so many *fore travels which God had given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith*:—and instead of being any, or all of them, our proper end and employment, or sufficient to our happiness,—he makes it plain, by a series of observations upon the life of man,—that they are ever likely to end with others where they had done with him,—that is, in vanity and vexation of spirit.

Then he takes notice of the several accidents of life, which perpetually rob us of what little sweets the fruition of these objects might seem to promise us,—both with regard to our endeavours and our persons in this world.

1st, With regard to our endeavours,—he shews that the most likely ways

and means are not always effectual for the attaining of their end:—that, in general,—the utmost that human councils and prudence can provide for, is to take care, when they contend in a race, that they be swifter than those who run against them;—or when they are to fight a battle, that they be stronger than those whom they are to encounter.—And yet afterwards, in the ninth chapter, he observes, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;—neither yet bread to the wise,—nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill;—but time and chance happens to them all.—That there are secret workings in human affairs, which over-rule all human contrivance, and counterplot the wisest of our councils, in so strange and unexpected a manner, as to cast a damp upon our best schemes and warmest endeavours.

And then, for those accidents to which our persons are as liable as our labours,——he observes these three things;—

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first, the natural infirmities of our bodies,—which alternately lay us open to the sad changes of pain and sickness; which, in the fifth chapter, he styles wrath and sorrow; under which, when a man lies languishing, none of his worldly enjoyments will signify much.—Like one that singeth songs with a heavy heart, neither mirth,—nor power,—nor riches, shall afford him ease,——nor will all their force be able so to stay the stroke of nature,—*but that he shall be cut off in the midst of his days, and then all his thoughts perish.*—Or else,—what is no uncommon spectacle, in the midst of all his luxury, he may waste away the greatest part of his life with much weariness and anguish; and with the long torture of an unrelenting disease, he may wish himself to go down into the grave, and to be set at liberty from all his possessions, and all his misery, at the same time.

2dly, If it be supposed,—that by the strength of spirits, and the natural cheerfulness of a man's temper, he should

escape these, *and live many years, and rejoice in them all*,—which is not the lot of many;—yet, *he must remember the days of darkness*;—that is,—they who devote themselves to a perpetual round of mirth and pleasure, cannot so manage matters as to avoid the thoughts of their *future states*, and the anxiety about what shall become of them hereafter, when they are to depart out of this world;—that they cannot so crowd their heads, and fill up their time with other matters,—but that the remembrance of this will sometimes be uppermost,—and thrust itself upon their minds whenever they are retired and serious.—And as this will naturally present to them a dark prospect of their future happiness,—it must, at the same time, prove no small damp and allay to what they would enjoy at present.

But, in the third place, suppose a man should be able to avoid sickness,—and to put the trouble of *these thoughts* likewise far from him,—yet there is something else which he cannot possibly

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decline;—old age will unavoidably steal upon him, with all the infirmities of it,——when (as he expresses it) *the grinders shall be few, and appetite ceases; when those who look out of the windows shall be darkened, and the keepers of the house shall tremble;*—when a man shall become a burden to himself, and to his friends;——when, perhaps, those of his nearest relations, whom he hath most obliged by kindness, shall think it time for him to depart, to creep off the stage, and make room for the succeeding generations.

And then, after a little funeral pomp of *mourners going about the streets,*—a man shall be buried out of the way, and in a year or two be as much forgotten, as if he had never existed.—For there is no remembrance (says he) of the wise more than the fool;—seeing that which now is, in the days to come, shall be forgotten; every day producing something which seems new and strange, to take up men's talk and wonder, and to drown the memory of former persons and actions.—

And I appeal to any rational man, whether these are not some of the most material reflections about human affairs,—which occur to every one who gives himself the least leisure to think about them?—Now, from all these premises put together, Solomon infers this short conclusion in the text,—That to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole duty of man;—that, to be serious in the matter of religion, and careful about our future state, is that which, after all our other experiments, will be found to be our chief happiness,—our greatest interest,—our greatest wisdom,—and that which most of all deserves our care and application.—This must ever be the last result, and the upshot of every wise man's observations upon all these transitory things, and upon the vanity of their several pretences to our well-being;—and we may depend upon it, as an everlasting truth,—that we can never find what we seek for in any other course, or any other object,—but this one;—and the more we know and think, and the more expe-

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rience we have of the world, and of ourselves, the more we are convinced of this truth, and led back by it to rest our souls upon that God from whence we came.—Every consideration upon the life of man tends to engage us to this point,—to be in earnest in the concernment of religion; to love and fear God;—to provide for our true interest, —and do ourselves the most effectual service,—by devoting ourselves to him, —and always thinking of him,—as he is the true and final happiness of a reasonable and an immortal spirit.

And indeed one would think it next to impossible,—did not the commonness of the thing take off from the wonder,—that a man who thinks at all,—should let his whole life be a contradiction to such obvious reflections.

The vanity and emptiness of worldly goods and enjoyments,—the shortness and uncertainty of life,—the unalterable event hanging over our heads,—*that in a few days, we must all of us go to that place from whence we shall not return;—*

the certainty of this,—the uncertainty of the time when, the immortality of the soul,—the doubtful and momentous issues of eternity,—the terrors of damnation, and the glorious things which are spoken of the city of God, are meditations so obvious, and so naturally check and block up a man's way,—are so very interesting, and, above all, so unavoidable,—that it is astonishing how it was possible, at any time, for mortal man to have his head full of any thing else!—And yet, was the same person to take a view of the state of the world,—how slight an observation would convince him, that the wonder lay, in fact, on the other side;—and that, as wisely as we all discourse, and philosophise *de contemptu mundi & fugâ sæculi*—yet, for one who really acts in the world—consistent with his own reflections upon it,—that there are multitudes who seem to take aim at nothing higher;—and, as empty a thing as it is,—are so dazzled with, as to think it meet to build tabernacles of rest upon it,——and say,

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It is good to be here.—Whether, as an able inquirer into this paradox guesses,—whether it is, that men do not heartily believe such a thing as a future state of happiness and misery,—or if they do,—that they do not actually and seriously consider it,—but suffer it to lie dormant and unactive within them, and so are as little affected with it, as if, in truth, they believed it not;—or whether they look upon it through that end of the perspective which represents as afar off,—and so are more forcibly drawn by the nearer, though the lesser, loadstone;—whether these, or whatever other cause may be assigned for it,—the observation is incontestible, that the bulk of mankind, in passing through this vale of misery,—use it *not as a well* to refresh and allay,—but fully to quench and satisfy their thirst;—minding or (as the Apostle says) relishing earthly things,—making them the end and sum-total of their desires and wishes,—and, in one word,—loving this world—just as they are commanded to

love God;—that is,—*with all their heart, with all their soul*,—with all their mind and strength.—But this is not the strangest part of this paradox.—A man shall not only lean and rest upon the world with his whole stress,—but, in many instances, shall live notoriously bad and vicious;—when he is reprov'd, he shall seem convinc'd;—when he is observ'd,——he shall be ashamed;—when he pursues his sin,——he will do it in the dark;—and when he has done it, shall even be dissatisfied with himself:——yet still, this shall produce no alteration in his conduct.—Tell him he shall one day die;——or bring the event still nearer,—and shew, that, according to the course of nature, he cannot possibly live many years,—he will sigh, perhaps,——and tell you he is convinc'd of that as much as reason and experience can make him:——proceed and urge to him,—that after death comes judgment, and that he will certainly there be dealt with by a just God according to his actions;—he will thank

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God he is no deist,—and tell you, with the same grave face,—he is thoroughly convinced of that too;—and as he believes,—no doubt, he trembles too:—and yet after all, with all this conviction upon his mind, you will see him still persevere in the same course,—and commit his sin with as certain an event and resolution, as if he knew no argument against it.—These notices of things, however terrible and true, pass through his understanding as an eagle through the air, that leaves no path behind.

So that, upon the whole, instead of abounding with occasions to set us seriously on thinking,—the world might dispense with many more calls of this kind;—and were they seven times as many as they are,—considering what insufficient use we make of those we have, all, I fear, would be little enough to bring these things to our remembrance as often, and engage us to lay them to our hearts with that affectionate concern, which the weight and interest of them

requires at our hands.—Sooner or later, the most inconsiderate of us all shall find, with Solomon,—that to do this effectually, is the whole of man.

And I cannot conclude this discourse upon his words better than with a short and earnest exhortation, that the solemnity of this season,—and the meditations to which it is devoted, may lead you up to the true knowledge and practice of the same point, of fearing God and keeping his commandments,—and convince you, as it did him, of the indispensable necessity of making that the business of a man's life, which is the chief end of his being,—the eternal happiness and salvation of his soul.

Which may God grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

S E R M O N XL.

Afa: a Thanksgiving Sermon.

2 CHRONICLES XV. 14.

And they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets.—
And all the men of Judah rejoiced at the oath.

IT will be necessary to give a particular account of what was the occasion, as well as the nature, of the oath which the men of Judah sware unto the Lord;—which will explain not only the reasons why it became a matter of so much joy to them, but likewise admit of an application suitable to the purposes of this solemn assembly.

Abijah, and Afa his son, were successive kings of Judah.—The first came to the crown at the close of a long, and, in the end, a very unsuccessful war, which had gradually wasted the strength and riches of his kingdom.

He was a prince endowed with the talents which the emergencies of his country required, and seemed born to make Judah a victorious, as well as a happy people.—The conduct and great success of his arms against Jeroboam, had well established the first;—but his kingdom, which had been so many years the seat of a war, had been so wasted and bewildered, that his reign, good as it was, was too short to accomplish the latter.—He died, and left the work unfinished for his son.—Asha succeeded, in the room of Abijah his father, with the truest notions of religion and government that could be fetched either from reason or experience.—His reason told him, that God should be worshipped in simplicity and singleness of heart;—therefore he took away the altars of the strange gods, and broke down their images.—His experience told him, that the most successful wars, instead of invigorating, more generally drained away the vitals of government,—and, at the best, ended but in a brighter and more ostentatious kind

of poverty and desolation :—therefore he laid aside his sword, and studied the arts of ruling Judah with peace.—Conscience would not suffer Aſa to ſacrifice his ſubjects to private views of ambition, and wiſdom forbid he ſhould ſuffer them to offer up themſelves to the pretence of public ones ;—ſince enlargement of empire, by the deſtruction of its people (the natural and only valuable ſource of ſtrength and riches), was a diſhoneſt and miſerable exchange.—And however well the glory of a conqueſt might appear in the eyes of a common beholder, yet, when bought at that coſtly rate, a father to his country would behold the triumphs which attended it, and weep, as it paſſed by him.—Amidſt all the glare and jollity of the day, the parent's eyes would fix attentively upon his child ;—he would diſcern him drooping under the weight of his attire, without ſtrength or vigour, his former beauty and comelineſs gone off :—he would behold the coat of many colours ſtained with blood, and cry,—Alas ! they have decked thee with a pa-

rent's pride, but not with a parent's care and foresight.

With such affectionate sentiments of government, and just principles of religion, Afa began his reign.—A reign marked out with new æras, and a succession of happier occurrences than what had distinguished former days.

The just and gentle spirit of the prince insensibly stole into the breasts of the people.—The men of Judah turned their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.—By industry and virtuous labour they acquired what by spoil and rapine they might have sought after long in vain.—The traces of their late troubles soon began to wear out.—The cities, which had become ruinous and desolate (the prey of famine and the sword), were now rebuilt, fortified, and made populous.—Peace, security, wealth, and prosperity, seemed to compose the whole history of Afa's reign.—O Judah! what could then have been done more than what was done to make thy people happy?—

What one blessing was withheld, that thou shouldst ever withhold thy thankfulness?—

That thou didst not continually turn thy eyes towards heaven with an habitual sense of God's mercies, and devoutly praise him for setting Afa over you?

Were not the public blessings, and the private enjoyments, which every man of Judah derived from them, such as to make the continuance of them desirable?—and what other way was there to effect it, than to swear unto the Lord, with all your hearts and souls, to perform the covenant made with your fathers?—to secure that favour and interest with the almighty Being, without which the wisdom of this world is foolishness, and the best connected systems of human policy are speculative and airy projects, without foundation or substance.—The history of their own exploits and establishment, since they had become a nation, was a strong confirmation of this doctrine.

But too free and uninterrupted a possession of GOD Almighty's blessings sometimes (though it seems strange to suppose it) even tempts men to forget him, either from a certain depravity and ingratitude of nature, not to be wrought upon by goodness,—or that they are made by it too passionately fond of the present hour, and too thoughtless of its great Author, whose kind providence brought it about.—This seemed to have been the case with the men of Judah:—for notwithstanding all that GOD had done for them, in placing Abijah and Afa his son over them, and inspiring them with hearts and talents proper to retrieve the errors of the foregoing reign, and bring back peace and plenty to the dwellings of Judah;—yet there appears no record of any solemn and religious acknowledgment to GOD for such signal favours.—The people sat down in a thankless security, each man under his vine, to eat and drink, and rose up to play;—more solicitous to enjoy their blessings, than to deserve them.

But this scene of tranquillity was not to subsist without some change;—and it seemed as if providence at length had suffered the stream to be interrupted, to make them consider whence it flowed, and how necessary it had been all along to their support.—The Ethiopians, ever since the beginning of Abijah's reign, until the tenth year of Asa's, had been at peace, or, at least, whatever secret enmity they bore, had made no open attacks upon the kingdom of Judah.—And indeed the bad measures which Rehoboam had taken, in the latter part of the reign which immediately preceded theirs, seemed to have saved the Ethiopians the trouble.—For Rehoboam, though in the former part of his reign he dealt wisely; yet, when he had established his kingdom, and strengthened himself,—he forsook the laws of the Lord;—he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men, which were brought up with him, and stood before him.—Such ill-advised measures, in all

probability, had given the enemies of Judah such decisive advantages over her, that they had sat down contented, and for many years enjoyed the fruits of their acquisitions.—But the friendship of princes is seldom made up of better materials than those which are every day to be seen in private life,—in which sincerity and affection are not at all considered as ingredients.—Change of time and circumstances produces a change of councils and behaviour.—Judah, in length of time, had become a fresh temptation, and was worth fighting for.—Her riches and plenty might first make her enemies covet, and then the remembrance of how cheap and easy a prey she had formerly been, might make them not doubt of obtaining.

By these apparent motives (or whether God, who sometimes over-rules the heart of man, was pleased to turn them by secret ones, to the purposes of his wisdom), the ambition of the Ethiopians revived, with an host of men numerous as the sand upon the sea-shore in

multitude.—They had left their country, and were coming forwards to invade them.—What can Judah propose to do in so terrifying a crisis?—where can she betake herself for refuge?—on one hand, her religion and laws are too precious to be given up, or trusted to the hands of a stranger;—and, on the other hand, how can so small a kingdom, just recovering strength, surrounded by an army of a thousand thousand men, besides chariots and horses, be able to withstand so powerful a shock?—But here it appeared that those, who, in their prosperity, can forget God, do yet remember him in the day of danger and distress;—and can begin with comfort to depend upon his providence, when with comfort they can depend upon nothing else.—For when Zerah, the Ethiopian, was come unto the valley of Zephatha at Maretha, Afa, and all the men of Judah, and Benjamin, went out against him;—and as they went, they cried mightily unto God,—And Afa prayed for his people, and he said,—“ O Lord ! it is nothing

with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power:—help us, O Lord our God! for we rest in thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude.—O Lord, thou art our God, let not man prevail against thee.” —Success almost seemed a debt due to the piety of the prince, and the contrition of his people.—So God smote the Ethiopians, and they could not recover themselves:—for they were scattered, and utterly destroyed,—before the Lord, and before his host. And as they returned to Jerusalem from pursuing,—behold the spirit of God came upon Afariah, the son of Oded.—And he went out to meet Afa, and he said unto him,—Hear ye me, Afa, and all Judah and Benjamin; the Lord is with you, whilst you are with him;—and if you seek him, he will be found of you, but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.—Nothing could more powerfully call home the conscience than so timely an expostulation.—The men of Judah and Benjamin, struck with a sense of

their late deliverance, and the many other felicities they had enjoyed since Afa was king over them, they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem, in the third month in the fifteenth year of Afa's reign;—and they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart, and with all their soul:—and they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets, and all Judah rejoiced at the oath.

One may observe a kind of luxury in the description, which the holy historian gives of the transport of the men of Judah upon this occasion.—And sure, if ever matter of joy was so reasonably founded, as to excuse any excesses in the expressions of it,—this was one:—for without it,—the condition of Judah, though otherwise the happiest, would have been, of all nations under heaven, the most miserable.

Let us suppose a moment, instead of being repulsed, that the enterprise of the Ethiopians had prospered against

them,—like other grievous distempers, where the vitals are first attacked,—Afa, their king, would have been fought after and have been made the first sacrifice.—He must either have fallen by the sword of battle, or execution; or, what is worse, he must have survived the ruin of his country by flight,—and worn out the remainder of his days in sorrow, for the afflictions which were come upon it.—In some remote corner of the world, the good king would have heard the particulars of Judah's destruction.—He would have been told how the country, which had become dear to him by his paternal care, was now utterly laid waste and all his labour lost;—how the fences which protected it were torn up, and the tender plant within, which he had so long sheltered, was cruelly trodden under foot and devoured.—He would hear how Zerah, the Ethiopian, when he had overthrown the kingdom, thought himself bound in conscience to overthrow the religion of it too, and establish his own idolatrous one in its stead.

—That, in pursuance of this, the holy religion, which Afa had reformed, had begun every where to be evil spoken of, and evil entreated:

That it was first banished from the courts of the king's house, and the midst of Jerusalem,—and then fled for safety out of the way into the wilderness, and found no city to dwell in.—That Zerah had rebuilt the altars of the strange gods, —which Afa's piety had broken down, and set up their images:

That his commandment was *urgent* that all should fall down and worship the idol he had made:—That, to complete the tale of their miseries, there was no prospect of deliverance for any but the worst of his subjects;—those who, in his reign, had either leaned in their hearts towards these idolatries,—or whose principles and morals were such, that all religions suited them alike.—But that the honest and conscientious men of Judah, unable to behold such abominations, hung down every man his head

like a bulrush, and put sack-cloth and ashes under him.

This picture of Judah's desolation might be some resemblance of what every of Aſa's ſubjects would probably form to himſelf, the day he ſolemnized an exemption from it.—And the tranſport was natural,—To ſwear unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with ſhout- ing, and with trumpets, and with cor- nets ;—to rejoice at the oath which ſe- cured their future peace, and celebrate it with all external marks of gladneſs.

I have at length gone through the ſto- ry, which gave the occaſion to this reli- gious act which is recorded of the men of Judah in the text.

I believe there is not one, in ſacred Scripture, that bids fairer for a parallel to our own times, or that would admit of an application more ſuitable to the ſo- lemnity of this day.

But men are apt to be ſtruck with likenesses in ſo different a manner, from the different points of view in which

they stand, as well as their diversity of judgments, that it is generally a very unacceptable piece of officiousness to fix any certain degrees of approach.

In this case, it seems sufficient,—that those who will discern the least resemblance, will discern enough to make them seriously comply with the devotion of the day;—and that those who are affected with it in a stronger manner, and see the blessing of a protestant king in its fairest light, with all the mercies which made way for it, will have still more abundant reason to adore that good Being, which has all along protected it from the enemies which have risen up to do it violence;—but more especially, in a late instance, by turning down the councils of the froward headlong,—and confounding the devices of the crafty,—so that their hands could not perform their enterprize.—Though this event, for many reasons, will ever be told amongst the felicities of these days;—yet for none more so,—than that it has given us a fresh mark of the continuation

of God Almighty's favour to us:—a part of that great complicated blessing for which we are gathered together to return him thanks.

Let us, therefore, I beseech you, endeavour to do it in the way which becomes wise men, and which is likely to be most acceptable;—and that is,——to pursue the intentions of his providence, in giving us the occasion——to become better men, and, by a holy and an honest conversation, make ourselves capable of enjoying what God has done for us.—In vain shall we celebrate the day with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, if we do not do it likewise with the internal and more certain marks of sincerity,—a reformation and purity in our manners.—It is impossible a sinful people can either be grateful to God, or properly loyal to their prince.—They cannot be grateful to the one, because they live not under a sense of his mercies;—nor can they be loyal to the other, because they daily offend in two of the tenderest points which concern his welfare.

By first disengaging the providence of God from taking to our part, and then giving a heart to our adversaries to lift their hands against us, who must know, that, if we forsake God, God will forsake us.—Their hopes, their designs, their wickedness against us, can only be built upon ours towards God.

For if they did not think we did evil, they durst not hope we could perish.

Cease, therefore, to do evil;—for by following righteousness, you will make the hearts of your enemies faint, they will turn their backs against your indignation, —and their weapons will fall from their hands.

Which may God grant, through the merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, to whom be all honour, &c. Amen.

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S E R M O N XLI.

Follow Peace.

HEBREWS XII. 14.

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which
no man shall see the Lord.

THE great end and design of our holy religion, next to the main view of reconciling us to God, was to reconcile us to each other;—by teaching us to subdue all those unfriendly dispositions in our nature, which unfit us for happiness, and the social enjoyment of the many blessings which God has enabled us to partake of in this world, miserable as it is in many respects.—Could christianity persuade the professors of it into this temper, and engage us, as its doctrine requires, to go on and exalt our natures, and, after the subduction of the most unfriendly of our passions, to plant,

in the room of them, all those (more natural to the soil) humane and benevolent inclinations, which, in imitation of the perfections of God, should dispose us to extend our love and goodness to our fellow-creatures, according to the extent of our abilities;—in like manner, as the goodness of God extends itself over all the works of the creation:—could this be accomplished,—the world would be worth living in;—and might be considered by us as a foretaste of what we should enter upon hereafter.

But such a system, you'll say, is merely visionary;—and, considering man as a creature so beset with selfishness, and other fretful passions that propensity prompts him to, though it is to be wished, it is not to be expected.—But our religion enjoins us to approach as near this fair pattern as we can; and, if it be possible, as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men;—where the term,—If possible, I own, implies it may not only be difficult, but sometimes impossible.—Thus the words of

the text.—Follow peace,—may by some be thought to imply,—that this desirable blessing may sometimes fly from us:—but still we are required to follow it, and not cease the pursuit, till we have used all warrantable methods to regain and settle it:—because, adds the apostle, without this frame of mind, no man shall see the Lord. For heaven is the region, as well as the recompence, of peace and benevolence; and such as do not desire and promote it here, are not qualified to enjoy it hereafter.

For this cause, in Scripture language,—peace is always spoke of as the great and comprehensive blessing, which included in it all manner of happiness;—and to wish peace to any house or person, was, in one word, to wish them all that was good and desirable.—Because happiness consists in the inward complacency and satisfaction of the mind; and he who has such a disposition of soul, as to acquiesce and rest contented with all the events of providence, can want nothing this world can give him.—Agreeable to

this, that short but most comprehensive hymn, sung by angels at our Saviour's birth, declaratory of the joy and happy ends of his incarnation,—after glory, in the first, to God,—the next note which sounded was, Peace upon earth, and good-will to men. It was a public wish of happiness to mankind, and implied a solemn charge to pursue the means that would ever lead to it.—And, in truth, the good tidings of the gospel are nothing else but a grand message and embassy of peace, to let us know, that our peace is made in heaven.

The prophet Isaiah styles our Saviour the Prince of Peace, long before he came into the world;—and to answer the title, he made choice to enter into it at a time when all nations were at peace with each other; which was in the days of Augustus,—when the temple of Janus was shut, and all the alarms of war were hushed and silenced throughout the world.—At his birth, the host of heaven descended, and proclaimed peace on earth, as the best state and temper the

world could be in to receive and welcome the Author of it.—His future conversation and doctrine, here upon earth, was every way agreeable with his peaceable entrance upon it;—the whole course of his life being but one great example of meekness, peace, and patience.—At his death, it was the only legacy he bequeathed to his followers:—My peace I give unto you.—How far this has taken place, or been actually enjoyed,—is not my intention to enlarge upon, any further than just to observe how precious a bequest it was, from the many miseries and calamities which have, and ever will, ensue from the want of it.—If we look into the larger circle of the world,—what desolations, dissolutions of government, and invasions of property!—what rapine, plunder, and profanation of the most sacred rights of mankind, are the certain unhappy effects of it!—fields dyed in blood,—the cries of orphans and widows, bereft of their best help, too fully instruct us.—Look into private life,—behold how good and plea-

fant a thing it is to live together in unity;—it is like the precious ointment poured upon the head of Aaron, that run down to his skirts;—importing, that this balm of life is felt and enjoyed, not only by governors of kingdoms, but is derived down to the lowest rank of life, and tasted in the most private recesses;—all, from the king to the peasant, are refreshed with its blessings, without which we can find no comfort in any thing this world can give.—It is this blessing gives every one to sit quietly under his vine, and reap the fruits of his labour and industry:—in one word, —which bespeaks who is the bestower of it—it is that only which keeps up the harmony and order of the world, and preserves every thing in it from ruin and confusion.

There is one saying of our Saviour's, recorded by St. Matthew, which, at first sight, seems to carry some opposition to this doctrine;—I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword.—But this reaches no farther than the bare words, not en-

tering so deep as to affect the sense, or imply any contradiction;—intimating only,—that the preaching of the gospel will prove in the event, through sundry unhappy causes, such as prejudices, the corruption of men's hearts, a passion for idolatry and superstition, the occasion of much variance and division even amongst nearest relations;—yea, and oft-times of bodily death, and many calamities and persecutions, which actually ensued upon the first preachers and followers of it.—Or the words may be understood,—as a beautiful description of the inward contests and opposition which christianity would occasion in the heart of man,—from its oppositions to the violent passions of our nature,—which would engage us in a perpetual warfare.—This was not only a sword,—a division betwixt nearest kindred;—but it was dividing a man against himself;—setting up an opposition to an interest long established,—strong by nature,—more so by uncontrouled custom.—This is verified every hour in the struggles for mastery betwixt

the principles of the world, the flesh and the devil;—which set up so strong a confederacy, that there is need of all the helps which reason and christianity can offer to bring them down.

But this contention is not that against which such exhortations in the gospel are levelled;—for the Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture, and be made consistent with itself.—And we find the distinguishing marks and doctrines, by which all men were to know who were Christ's disciples,—was that benevolent frame of mind towards all our fellow-creatures, which, by itself, is a sufficient security for the particular social duty here recommended:—so far from meditations of war;—for love thinketh no evil to his neighbour;—so far from doing any, it harbours not the least thought of it;—but on the contrary, rejoices with them that rejoice, and weeps with them that weep.

This debt christianity has highly exalted; though it is a debt that we were sensible of before, and acknowledged

to be owed to human nature,—which, as we all partake of,—so ought we to pay it in a suitable respect.—For, as men, we are allied together in the natural bond of brotherhood, and are members one of another.—We have the same Father in heaven, who made us and takes care of us all.—Our earthly extraction too is nearer alike, than the pride of the world cares to be reminded of:—for Adam was the father of us all, and Eve the mother of all living.—The prince and the beggar sprung from the same stocks, as wide asunder as the branches are.—So that, in this view, the most upstart family may vie antiquity, and compare families with the greatest monarchs.—We are all formed too of the same mould, and must equally return to the same dust.—So that, to love our neighbour, and live quietly with him, is to live at peace with ourselves.—He is but self-multiplied, and enlarged into another form; and to be unkind or cruel to him, is but, as Solomon observes of the unmerciful, to be

cruel to our own flesh.—As a farther motive and engagement to this peaceable commerce with each other,—God has placed us all in one another's power by turns,—in a condition of mutual need and dependence.—There is no man so liberally stocked with earthly blessings, as to be able to live without another man's aid.—God, in his wisdom, has so dispensed his gifts, in various kinds and measures, as to render us helpful, and make a social intercourse indispensable.—The prince depends on the labour and industry of the peasant;—and the wealth and honour of the greatest persons are fed and supported from the same source.

This the Apostle hath elegantly set forth to us by the familiar resemblance of the natural body;—wherein there are many members, and all have not the same office; but the different faculties and operations of each, are for the use and benefit of the whole.—The eye sees not for itself, but for the other members;—and is set up as a light to

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direct them :—the feet serve to support and carry about the other parts ; and the hands act and labour for them all. It is the same in states and kingdoms, wherein there are many members, yet each in their several functions and employments ; which, if peaceably discharged, are for the harmony of the whole state.—Some are eyes and guides to the blind ;—others, feet to the lame and impotent ;—some to supply the place of the head, to assist with council and direction ;—others the hand, to be useful by their labour and industry.—To make this link of dependence still stronger,—there is a great portion of mutability in all human affairs, to make benignity of temper not only our duty, but our interest and wisdom.—There is no condition in life so fixed and permanent as to be out of danger, or the reach of change :—and we all may depend upon it, that we shall take our turns of wanting and desiring.—By how many unforeseen causes may riches take wing !—The crowns of princes may be

shaken, and the greatest that ever awed the world have experienced what the turn of the wheel can do.—That which hath happened to one man, may befall another; and, therefore, that excellent rule of our Saviour's ought to govern us in all our actions,—Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise.—Time and chance happens to all;—and the most affluent may be stript of all, and find his worldly comforts like so many withered leaves dropping from him.—Sure nothing can better become us, than hearts so full of our dependance as to overflow with mercy, and pity, and goodwill towards mankind.—To exhort us to this, is, in other words, to exhort us to follow peace with all men:—the first is the root,—this the fair fruit and happy product of it.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, in the bowels of mercy, let us put away anger, and malice, and evil speaking;—let us fly all clamour and strife;—let us be kindly affected one to another,

—following peace with all men, and holiness, that we may see the Lord.

Which God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits of his Son, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

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S E R M O N XLII.

Search the Scriptures.

ST. JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

THAT things of the most inestimable use and value, for want of due application and study laid out upon them, may be passed by unregarded, nay, even looked upon with coldness and aversion, is a truth too evident to need enlarging on.—Nor is it less certain that prejudices, contracted by an unhappy education, will sometimes so stop up all the passages to our hearts, that the most amiable objects can never find access, or bribe us by all their charms into justice and impartiality.—It would be passing the tenderest reflection upon the age we live in, to say it is owing to one of these, that those inestimable

books, the Sacred Writings, meet so often with a disrelish (what makes the accusation almost incredible) amongst persons who set up for men of taste and delicacy; who pretend to be charmed with what they call beauties and nature in classical authors, and in other things would blush not to be reckoned amongst sound and impartial critics.—But so far has negligence and prepossession stopped their ears against the voice of the charmer, that they turn over those awful sacred pages with inattention and an unbecoming indifference, unaffected amidst ten thousand sublime and noble passages, which, by the rules of sound criticism and reason, may be demonstrated to be truly eloquent and beautiful.

Indeed the opinion of false Greek and barbarous language, in the Old and New Testament, had, for some ages, been a stumbling-block to another set of men, who were professedly great readers and admirers of the ancients.—The Sacred Writings were, by these

persons, rudely attacked on all sides: expressions which came not within the compass of their learning, were branded with barbarism and solecism; words which scarce signified any thing but the ignorance of those who laid such groundless charges on them.—Presumptuous man!—Shall he, who is but dust and ashes, dare to find fault with the words of that Being, who first inspired man with language, and taught his mouth to utter;—who opened the lips of the dumb, and made the infant eloquent!—These persons, as they attacked the inspired writings on the foot of critics and men of learning, accordingly have been treated as such:—and tho' a shorter way might have been gone to work, which was,—that as their accusations reached no farther than the bare words and phraseology of the Bible, they, in no wise, affected the sentiments and soundness of the doctrines, which were conveyed with as much clearness and perspicuity to mankind, as they could have been, had the language been written

with the utmost elegance and grammatical nicety. And even though the charge of barbarous idioms could be made out;—yet the cause of christianity was thereby no ways affected, but remained just in the state they found it.—Yet, unhappily for them, they even miscarried in their favourite point;—there being few, if any at all, of the Scripture expressions, which may not be justified by numbers of parallel modes of speaking, made use of amongst the purest and most authentic Greek authors.—This, an able hand amongst us, not many years ago, has sufficiently made out, and thereby baffled and exposed all their presumptuous and ridiculous assertions.—These persons, bad and deceitful as they were, are yet far outgone by a third set of men.—I wish we had not too many instances of them, who, like foul stomachs, that turn the sweetest food to bitterness, upon all occasions endeavour to make merry with sacred Scripture, and turn every thing they meet with therein into banter and

burlesque.—But as men of this stamp, by their excess of wickedness and weakness together, have entirely disarmed us from arguing with them as reasonable creatures, it is not only making them too considerable, but likewise to no purpose to spend much time about them, they being, in the language of the Apostle, creatures of no understanding, speaking evil of things they know not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.—Of these two last, the one is disqualified for being argued with, and the other has no occasion for it; they being already silenced.—Yet those that were first mentioned, may not altogether be thought unworthy of our endeavours;—being persons, as was hinted above, who, though their tastes are so far vitiated that they cannot relish the Sacred Scriptures, yet have imaginations capable of being raised by the fancied excellencies of classical writers.—And indeed these persons claim from us some degree of pity, when, through the unskillfulness of preceptors in their

youth, or some other unhappy circumstance in their education, they have been taught to form false and wretched notions of good writing.—When this is the case, it is no wonder they should be more touched and affected with the dressed-up trifles and empty conceits of poets and rhetoricians, than they are with that true sublimity and grandeur of sentiment which glow throughout every page of the inspired writings.—By way of information, such should be instructed:—

There are two sorts of eloquence, the one indeed scarce deserves the name of it, which consists chiefly in laboured and polished periods, an over-curious, and artificial arrangement of figures, tinsel'd over with a gaudy embellishment of words, which glitter, but convey little or no light to the understanding.—This kind of writing is for the most part much affected and admired by people of weak judgment and vicious taste, but is a piece of affectation and formality the sacred writers are ut-

ter strangers to.—It is a vain and boyish eloquence; and as it has always been esteemed below the great geniuses of all ages, so much more so, with respect to those writers who were actuated by the spirit of infinite wisdom, and therefore wrote with that force and majesty with which never man writ.—The other sort of eloquence is quite the reverse to this, and which may be said to be the true characteristic of the holy Scriptures; where the excellence does not arise from a laboured and far-fetched elocution, but from a surprising mixture of simplicity and majesty, which is a double character, so difficult to be united, that it is seldom to be met with in compositions merely human.—We see nothing in holy writ of affectation and superfluous ornament.—As the infinite wise Being has condescended to stoop to our language, thereby to convey to us the light of revelation, so has he been pleased graciously to accommodate it to us with the most natural and graceful plainness it would admit of.—Now,

it is observable that the most excellent prophane authors, whether Greek or Latin, lose most of their graces whenever we find them literally translated.—Homer's famed representation of Jupiter, in his first book;—his cried-up description of a tempest;—his relation of Neptune's shaking the earth, and opening it to its center;—his description of Pallas's horses; with numbers of other long-since admired passages,—flag, and almost vanish away, in the vulgar Latin translation.

Let any one but take the pains to read the common Latin interpretation of Virgil, Theocritus, or even of Pindar, and one may venture to affirm he will be able to trace out but few remains of the graces which charmed him so much in the original.—The natural conclusion from hence is, that in the classical authors, the expression, the sweetness of the numbers, occasioned by a musical placing of words, constitute a great part of their beauties;—whereas, in the Sacred Writings, they consist more in the

greatness of the things themselves, than in the words and expressions.—The ideas and conceptions are so great and lofty in their own nature, that they necessarily appear magnificent in the most artless dress.—Look but into the Bible, and we see them shine through the most simple and literal translations.—That glorious description which Moses gives of the creation of the heavens and the earth, which Longinus, the best critic the eastern world ever produced, was so justly taken with, has not lost the least whit of its intrinsic worth; and though it has undergone so many translations, yet triumphs over all, and breaks forth with as much force and vehemence as in the original.—Of this stamp are numbers of passages throughout the Scriptures;—instance, that celebrated description of a tempest in the hundred and seventh psalm; those beautiful reflections of holy Job, upon the shortness of life, and instability of human affairs, so judiciously appointed by our church in her office for the burial of

the dead;—that lively description of a horse of war, in the thirty-ninth chapter of Job, in which, from the 19th to the 26th verse, there is scarce a word which does not merit a particular explication to display the beauties of.—I might add to these, those tender and pathetic expostulations with the children of Israel, which run throughout all the prophets, which the most uncritical reader can scarce help being affected with.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.—What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done?—wherefore, when I expected that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?—and yet, ye say, the way of the Lord is unequal.—Hear now, O house of Israel,—is not my way equal?—are not your ways unequal?—have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, and not that he should return from his ways and live?—I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled

against me.—The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib;—but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.—There is nothing in all the eloquence of the heathen world comparable to the vivacity and tenderness of these reproaches;—there is something in them so thoroughly affecting, and so noble and sublime withal, that one might challenge the writings of the most celebrated orators of antiquity to produce any thing like them.—These observations upon the superiority of the inspired penmen to heathen ones, in that which regards the composition more conspicuously, hold good when they are considered upon the foot of historians.—Not to mention that profane histories give an account only of human achievements and temporal events, which, for the most part, are so full of uncertainty and contradictions, that we are at a loss where to seek for truth;—but that the sacred history is the history of God himself, —the history of his omnipotence and

infinite wisdom, his universal providence, his justice and mercy, and all his other attributes, displayed under a thousand different forms, by a series of the most various and wonderful events that ever happened to any nation, or language:—not to insist upon this visible superiority in sacred history,—there is yet another undoubted excellence the prophane historians seldom arrive at, which is almost the distinguishing character of the sacred ones; namely, that unaffected, artless manner of relating historical facts,—which is so intirely of a piece with every other part of the holy writings.—What I mean will be best made out by a few instances.—In the history of Joseph (which certainly is told with the greatest variety of beautiful and affecting circumstances), when Joseph makes himself known, and weeps aloud upon the neck of his dear brother Benjamin, that all the house of Pharaoh heard him; at that instant, none of his brethren are introduced as uttering aught, either to

express their present joy, or palliate their former injuries to him.—On all sides, there immediately ensues a deep and solemn silence;—a silence infinitely more eloquent and expressive, than any thing else could have been substituted in its place.—Had Thucydides, Herodotus, Livy, or any of the celebrated classical historians, been employed in writing this history, when they came to this point, they would, doubtless, have exhausted all their fund of eloquence in furnishing Joseph's brethren with laboured and studied harangues; which, however fine they might have been in themselves, would nevertheless have been unnatural, and altogether improper on the occasion.—For when such a variety of contrary passions broke in upon them,—what tongue was able to utter their hurried and distracted thoughts?—When remorse, surprise, shame, joy and gratitude struggled together in their bosoms, how uneloquently would their lips have performed their duty?—how unfaithfully their tongues have spoken the language

of their hearts?—In this case, silence was truly eloquent and natural, and tears expressed what oratory was incapable of.

If ever these persons I have been addressing myself to, can be persuaded to follow the advice in the text, of searching the Scriptures,—the work of their salvation will be begun upon its true foundation.—For, first, they will insensibly be led to admire the beautiful propriety of their language:—when a favourable opinion is conceived of this, next, they will more closely attend to the goodness of the moral, and the purity and soundness of the doctrines.—The pleasure of reading will still be increased, by that near concern which they will find themselves to have in those many important truths, which they will see so clearly demonstrated in the Bible, that grand charter of our eternal happiness.—It is the fate of mankind, too often, to seem insensible of what they may enjoy at the easiest rate.—What might not our neighbouring Romish countries, who groan under the yoke of

popish impositions and priestcraft, what might not those poor misguided creatures give, for the happiness which we know not how to value,—of being born in a country where a church is established by our laws, and encouraged by our princes;—which not only allows the free study of the Scriptures, but even exhorts and invites us to it;—a church that is a stranger to the tricks and artifice of having the Bible in an unknown tongue, to give the greater latitude to the designs of the clergy, in imposing their own trumpery, and foisting in whatever may best serve to aggrandize themselves, or enslave the wretches committed to their trust.—In short, our religion was not given us to raise our imaginations with ornaments of words, or strokes of eloquence; but to purify our hearts, and lead us into the paths of righteousness.—However, not to defend ourselves,—when the attack is principally levelled at this point,—might give occasion to our adversaries to triumph, and charge us either with negligence or

inability.—It is well known how willing the enemies of our religion are to seek occasions against us;—how ready to magnify every mote in our eyes to the bigness of a beam;—how eager, upon the least default, to insult and cry out, —There, there! so would we have it: —not, perhaps, that we are so much the subject of malice and aversion, but that the licentious age seems bent upon bringing christianity into discredit at any rate; and, rather than miss the aim, would strike through the sides of those that are sent to teach it.—Thank God, the truth of our holy religion is established with such strong evidence, that it rests upon a foundation never to be overthrown, either by the open assaults or cunning devices of wicked and designing men.—The part we have to act is to be steady, sober, and vigilant; to be ready to every good work; to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering; to give occasion of offence to no man; that, with well-doing, we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

I shall close all with that excellent collect of our church:—

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning,—grant that we may in suchwise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Now to God the Father, &c.

I shall write all with my own hand
 and on my church.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy
 Scriptures to be written for our learning,
 grant that we may in humble heart
 devoutly read, learn, and inwardly
 digest them that by patience and con-
 stancy of holy word we may continue
 and ever hold fast the blessed hope of
 everlasting life, which thou hast given
 us in thy Son, our Saviour Jesus
 Christ.

Now to God the Father, &c.
 Amen.

S E R M O N XLIII.

PSALM XCV. 6, 7.

O come let us worship and fall down before him : —
for he is the Lord our God. —

IN this psalm we find holy David taken up with the pious contemplation of God's infinite power, majesty, and greatness :—he considers him as the sovereign Lord of the whole earth, the maker and supporter of all things ;—that by him the heavens were created, and all the host of them ; that the earth was wisely fashioned by his hands ;—he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods :—that we likewise, the people of his pasture, were raised up by the same creating hand, from nothing, to the dignity of rational creatures, made, with respect to our reason and understanding, after his own most perfect image.

It was natural to imagine that such a contemplation would light up a flame of devotion in any grateful man's breast; and accordingly we find it break forth in the words of the text, in a kind of religious rapture :

O come let us worship and fall down before him:—for he is the Lord our God.

Sure never exhortation to prayer and worship can be better enforced than upon this principle,—that God is the cause and creator of all things;—that each individual being is upheld in the station it was first placed, by the same hand which first formed it;—that all the blessings and advantages, which are necessary to the happiness and welfare of beings on earth, are only to be derived from the same fountain;—and that the only way to do it, is to secure an interest in his favour, by a grateful expression of our sense for the benefits we have received, and a humble dependance upon him for those we expect and stand in want of.—Whom have we in heaven,

says the Psalmist, but thee, O God, to look unto or depend on ;—to whom shall we pour out our complaints, and speak of all our wants and necessities, but to thy goodness, which is ever willing to confer upon us whatever becomes us to ask, and thee to grant ;—because thou hast promised to be nigh unto all that call upon thee,—yea, unto all such as call upon thee faithfully ;—that thou wilt fulfil the desire of them that fear thee, that thou wilt also hear their cry, and help them.

Of all duties, prayer certainly is the sweetest and most easy.—There are some duties which may seem to occasion a troublesome opposition to the natural workings of flesh and blood ;—such as the forgiveness of injuries, and the love of our enemies ;—others, which will force us unavoidably into a perpetual struggle with our passions,—which war against the soul ;—such as chastity,—temperance,—humility.—There are other virtues, which seem to bid us forget our present interest for a while,—

such as charity and generosity;—others, that teach us to forget it at all times, and wholly to fix our affections on things above, and in no circumstance to act like men that look for a continuing city here, but upon one to come, whose builder and maker is GOD.—But this duty of prayer and thanksgiving to GOD—has no such oppositions to encounter;—it takes no bullock out of thy field,—no horse out of thy stable,—nor he-goat out of thy fold;—it costeth no weariness of bones, no untimely watchings;—it requireth no strength of parts, or painful study, but just to know and have a true sense of our dependance, and of the mercies by which we are upheld:—and with this, in every place and posture of body, a good man may lift up his soul unto the Lord his GOD.

Indeed, as to the frequency of putting this duty formally in practice, as the precept must necessarily have varied according to the different stations in which GOD has placed us;—so he has been pleased to determine nothing precisely

concerning it:—for, perhaps, it would be unreasonable to expect that the day-labourer, or he that supports a numerous family by the sweat of his brow, should spend as much of his time in devotion, as the man of leisure and unbounded wealth.—This, however, in the general, may hold good, that we are bound to pay this tribute to God, as often as his providence has put an opportunity into our hands of so doing;—provided that no plea, drawn from the necessary attentions to the affairs of the world, which many men's situations oblige them to, may be supposed to extend to an exemption from paying their morning and evening sacrifice to God.—For it seems to be the least that can be done to answer the demand of our duty in this point,—successively to open and shut up the day in prayer and thanksgiving;—since there is not a morning thou risest, or a night thou liest down, but thou art indebted for it to the watchful providence of Almighty God.—David and Daniel, whose names are recorded in

Scripture for future example:—the first, though a mighty king, embarrassed with wars abroad, and unnatural disturbances at home; a situation, one would think, would allow little time for any thing but his own and his kingdom's safety;—yet found he leisure to pray *seven times* a day:—the latter, the counsellor and first minister of state to the great Nebuchadnezzar; and, though perpetually fatigued with the affairs of a mighty kingdom, and the government of the whole province of Babylon, which was committed to his administration;—though near the person of an idolatrous king, and amidst the temptations of a luxurious court,—yet never neglected he his God; but, as we read,—he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before him.

A frequent correspondence with heaven, by prayer and devotion, is the greatest nourishment and support of spiritual life:—it keeps the sense of a God warm and lively within us,—which secures our disposition, and sets such

guards over us, that hardly will a temptation prevail against us.—Who can entertain a base or an impure thought, or think of executing it, who is incessantly conversing with his GOD?—or not despise every temptation this lower world can offer him, when, by his constant addresses before the throne of GOD's majesty, he brings the glorious prospect of heaven perpetually before his eyes?

I cannot help here taking notice of the doctrine of those who would resolve all devotion into the inner man, and think that there is nothing more requisite to express our reverence to GOD, but purity and integrity of heart,—unaccompanied either with words or actions.—To this opinion it may be justly answered, that, in the present state we are in, we find such a strong sympathy and union between our souls and bodies, that the one cannot be touched or sensibly affected, without producing some corresponding emotion in the other.—Nature has assigned a different look, tone of voice, and gesture, peculiar to every

passion and affection we are subject to; and, therefore, to argue against this strict correspondence which is held between our souls and bodies,—is disputing against the frame and mechanism of human nature.—We are not angels, but men clothed with their bodies, and in some measure, governed by our imaginations, that we have need of all these external helps which nature has made the interpreters of our thoughts.—And, no doubt, though a virtuous and a good life are more acceptable in the sight of God, than either prayer or thanksgiving;—for behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams;—nevertheless, as the one ought to be done, so the other ought not, by any means, to be left undone.—As God is to be obeyed,—so he is to be worshipped also.—For although inward holiness and integrity of heart is the ultimate end of the divine dispensations;—yet external religion is a certain means of promoting it.—Each of them has its just bounds;—and there-

fore, as we would not be so carnal as merely to rest contented with the one,—so neither can we pretend to be so spiritual as to neglect the other.

And though God is all-wise, and therefore understands our thoughts afar off,—and knows the exact degrees of our love and reverence to him, though we should withhold those outward marks of it;—yet God himself has been graciously pleased to command us to pray to him;—that we might beg the assistance of his grace to work with us against our own infirmities;—that we might acknowledge him to be, what he is, the supreme Lord of the whole world;—that we might testify the sense we have of all his mercies and loving kindness to us,—and confess that he has the propriety of every thing we enjoy,—that the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

Thus much of this duty of prayer in general.—From every individual it may be reasonably expected, from a bare reflection upon his own station, his personal wants, and the daily blessings which he has received in particular;—

but, for those blessings bestowed upon the whole species in common,—reason seems further to require, that a joint return should be made by as many of the species as can conveniently assemble together for this religious purpose.—From hence arises, likewise, the reasonableness of public worship, and sacred places set apart for that purpose; without which, it would be very difficult to preserve that sense of God and religion upon the minds of men, which is so necessary to their well-being, considered only as a civil society, and with regard to the purposes of this life, and the influence which a just sense of it must have upon their actions.—Besides, men, who are united in societies, can have no other cement to unite them likewise in religious ties, as well as in manners of worship and points of faith, but the institution of solemn times and public places destined for that use.

And it is not to be questioned, that if the time, as well as place, for serving God, were once considered as indifferent, and left so far to every man's choice

as to have no calls to public prayer, however a sense of religion might be preserved a while by a few speculative men, yet that the bulk of mankind would lose all knowledge of it, and in time live without God in the world.—Not that private prayer is the less our duty, the contrary of which is proved above; and our Saviour says, that when we pray to God in secret, we shall be rewarded openly;—but that prayers which are publicly offered up in God's house, tend more to the glory of God, and the benefit of ourselves:—for this reason, that they are presumed to be performed with greater attention and seriousness, and therefore most likely to be heard with a more favourable acceptance.—And for this, one might appeal to every man's breast, whether he has not been affected with the most elevated pitch of devotion, when he gave thanks in the great congregation of the saints, and praised God amongst much people? —Of this united worship there is a glorious description which St. John

gives us, in the Revelations, where he supposes the whole universe joining together, in their several capacities, to give glory in this manner to their common Lord.—Every creature which was in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as were in the seas, and all that were in them, heard I, crying,—Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne.

But here it may be asked, that if public worship tends so much to promote the glory of God,—and is what is so indispensably the duty and benefit of every christian state,—how came it to pass, that our blessed Saviour left no command to his followers, throughout the gospel, to set up public places of worship, and keep them sacred for that purpose?—It may be answered,—that the necessity of setting apart places for divine worship, and the holiness of them when thus set apart, seemed already to have been so well established by former revelation, as not to need any express

precept upon that subject:—for though the particular appointment of the temple, and the confinement of worship to that place alone, were only temporary parts of the Jewish covenant; yet the necessity and duty of having places somewhere solemnly dedicated to God carried a moral reason with it, and therefore was not abolished with the ceremonial part of the law.—Our Saviour came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law;—and therefore the moral precepts of it, which promoted a due regard to the divine Majesty, remained in as full force as ever.—And accordingly we find it attested, both by christian and heathen writers, that so soon as the second century, when the number of believers was much increased, and the circumstances of rich converts enabled them to do it,—that they began to erect edifices for divine worship;—and though, under the frowns and oppression of the civil power, they every Sabbath assembled themselves therein, that with one heart and one lip they might declare whose they were, and

whom they served, and, as the servants of one Lord, might offer up their joint prayers and petitions.

I wish there was no reason to lament an abatement of this religious zeal amongst christians of later days.— Though the piety of our forefathers seems, in a great measure, to have deprived us of the merit of building churches for the service of God, there can be no such plea for not frequenting them in a regular and solemn manner.—How often do people absent themselves (when in the utmost distress how to dispose of themselves) from church, even upon those days which are set apart for nothing else but the worship of God;—when, to trifle that day away, or apply any portion of it to secular concerns, is a sacrilege almost in the literal sense of the word.

From this duty of public prayer arises another, which I cannot help speaking of, it being so dependant upon it;—I mean a serious, devout, and respectful behaviour, when we are performing this

solemn duty in the house of God.— This is surely the least that can be necessary in the immediate presence of the Sovereign of the world, upon whose acceptance of our addresses all our present and future happiness depends.

External behaviour is the result of inward reverence, and is therefore part of our duty to God, whom we are to worship in body as well as spirit.

And as no one should be wanting in outward respect and decorum before an earthly prince or superior, much less should we be so before him, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.

Notwithstanding the obviousness of this branch of duty,—it seems often to be little understood;—and whoever will take a general survey of church behaviour, will often meet with scenes of sad variety.—What a vein of indolence and indevotion sometimes seems to run throughout whole congregations!—what ill timed pains do some take in putting on an air of gaiety and indifference in the most interesting parts of this duty,

—even when they are making confession of their sins, as if they were ashamed to be thought serious with their God! —Surely, to address ourselves to his infinite Majesty after a negligent and dispassionate manner, besides the immediate indignity offered, it is a sad sign we little consider the blessings we ask for, and far less deserve them.—Besides, what is a prayer, unless our heart and affections go along with it?—It is not so much as the shadow of devotion; and little better than the papists telling their beads,—or honouring God with their lips, when their hearts are far from him.—The consideration that a person is come to prostrate himself before the throne of high heaven, and in that place which is particularly distinguished by his presence, is sufficient inducement for any one to watch over his imagination, and guard against the least appearance of levity and disrespect.

An inward sincerity will of course influence the outward deportment; but

where the one is wanting, there is great reason to suspect the absence of the other.—I own it is possible, and often happens, that this external garb of religion may be worn, when there is little within of a piece with it;—but I believe the converse of the proposition can never happen to be true, that a truly religious frame of mind should exist without some outward mark of it.—The mind will shine through the veil of flesh which covers it, and naturally express its religious dispositions;—and, if it possesses the power of godliness,—will have the external form of it too.

May God grant us to be defective in neither,—but that we may so praise and magnify God on earth,—that when he cometh, at the last day, with ten thousand of his saints in heaven, to judge the world, we may be partakers of their eternal inheritance. Amen.

S E R M O N XLIV.

The Ways of Providence justified, to Man.

PSALM LXXIII. 12, 13.

Behold these are the ungodly who prosper in the world,
they increase in riches.

Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my
hands in innocency.

THIS complaint of the Psalmist's concerning the promiscuous distribution of GOD's blessings to the just and unjust,—that the sun should shine without distinction upon the good and the bad,—and rains descend upon the righteous and unrighteous man,—is a subject that has afforded much matter for inquiry, and at one time or other has raised doubts to dishearten and perplex the minds of men. If the sovereign Lord of all the earth does look on, whence so much disorder in the face of

things?—why is it permitted, that wise and good men should be left often a prey to so many miseries and distresses of life, —whilst the guilty and foolish triumph in their offences, and even the tabernacles of robbers prosper?

To this it is answered,—that therefore there is a future state of rewards and punishments to take place after this life,—wherein all these inequalities shall be made even, where the circumstances of every man's case shall be considered, and where God shall be justified in all his ways, and every mouth shall be stopt.

If this was not so,—if the ungodly were to prosper in the world, and have riches in possession,—and no distinction to be made hereafter,—to what purpose would it have been to have maintained our integrity?—Lo! then, indeed, should I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

It is farther said, and what is a more direct answer to the point,—that when God created man, that he might make

him capable of receiving happiness at his hands hereafter,—he endowed him with liberty and freedom of choice, without which he could not have been a creature accountable for his actions;—that it is merely from the bad use he makes of these gifts,—that all those instances of irregularity do result, upon which the complaint is here grounded,—which could no ways be prevented, but by the total subversion of human liberty;—that should God make bare his arm, and interpose in every injustice that is committed,—mankind might be said to do what was right,—but, at the same time, to lose the merit of it, since they would act under force and necessity, and not from the determinations of their own mind;—that, upon this supposition,—a man could with no more reason expect to go to heaven for acts of temperance, justice, and humanity, than for the ordinary impulses of hunger and thirst, which nature directed —that God has dealt with man upon

better terms;—he has first endowed him with liberty and free-will;—he has set life and death, good and evil, before him;—that he has given him faculties to find out what will be the consequences of either way of acting, and then left him to take which course his reason and direction shall point out.

I shall desist from enlarging any further upon either of the foregoing arguments in vindication of God's providence, which are urged so often with so much force and conviction, as to leave no room for a reasonable reply;—since the miseries which befall the good, and the seeming happiness of the wicked, could not be otherwise in such a free state and condition as this in which we are placed.

In all charges of this kind, we generally take two things for granted;—1st, That in the instances we give, we know certainly the good from the bad;—and, 2dly, The respective state of their enjoyments or sufferings.

I shall therefore, in the remaining part of my discourse, take up your time with a short inquiry into the difficulties of coming not only at the true characters of men,—but likewise of knowing either the degrees of their real happiness or misery in this life.

The first of these will teach us candour in our judgment of others;—the second, to which I shall confine myself, will teach us humility in our reasonings upon the ways of God.

For though the miseries of the good, and the prosperity of the wicked, are not in general to be denied;—yet I shall endeavour to shew, that the particular instances we are apt to produce, when we cry out in the words of the Psalmist, Lo! these are the ungodly,—these prosper, and are happy in the world;—I say, I shall endeavour to shew, that we are so ignorant of the articles of the charge,—and the evidence we go upon to make them good is so lame and defective,—as to be sufficient by itself to check all propensity to expostulate with

God's providence, allowing there was no other way of clearing up the matter reconcileably to his attributes.

And, first,—what certain and infallible marks have we of the goodness or badness of the bulk of mankind?

If we trust to fame and reports,—if they are good, how do we know but they may proceed from partial friendship or flattery?—when bad, from envy or malice, from ill-natured surmises and constructions of things?—and, on both sides, from small matters aggrandized through mistake,—and sometimes through the unskilful relation of even truth itself?—From some, or all of which causes, it happens, that the characters of men, like the histories of the Egyptians, are to be received and read with caution;—they are generally dressed out and disfigured with so many dreams and fables, that every ordinary reader shall not be able to distinguish truth from falsehood.—But allowing these reflections to be too severe in this matter,—that no such thing as envy ever lessened

a man's character, or malice blackened it;—yet the characters of men are not easily penetrated, as they depend often upon the retired, unseen parts of a man's life.—The best and truest piety is most secret, and the worst of actions, for different reasons, will be so too.—Some men are modest, and seem to take pains to hide their virtues; and, from a natural distance and reserve in their tempers, scarce suffer their good qualities to be known:—others, on the contrary, put in practice a thousand little arts to counterfeit virtues which they have not,—the better to conceal those vices which they really have;—and this under fair shows of sanctity, good-nature, generosity, or some virtue or other,—too specious to be seen through,—too amiable and disinterested to be suspected.—These hints may be sufficient to shew how hard it is to come at the matter of fact:—but one may go a step further,—and say, that even that, in many cases, could we come to the knowledge of it, is not sufficient by itself to pronounce a man either good or bad.—There are num-

bers of circumstances which attend every action of a man's life, which can never come to the knowledge of the world,—yet ought to be known, and well weighed, before sentence with any justice can be passed upon him.—A man may have different views and a different sense of things from what his judges have; and what he understands and feels, and what passes within him, may be a secret treasured up deeply there for ever.—A man, through bodily infirmity, or some complexional defect, which perhaps is not in his power to correct,—may be subject to inadvertencies,—to starts—and unhappy turns of temper; he may lay open to snares he is not always aware of; or, through ignorance and want of information and proper helps, he may labour in the dark:—in all which cases he may do many things which are wrong in themselves, and yet be innocent;—at least an object rather to be pitied than censured with severity and ill-will.—These are difficulties which stand in every one's

way in the forming a judgment of the characters of others.—But, for once, let us suppose them all to be got over, so that we could see the bottom of every man's heart;—let us allow that the word rogue or honest man, was wrote so legibly in every man's face, that no one could possibly mistake it;—yet still the happiness of both the one and the other, which is the only fact that can bring the charge home, is what we have so little certain knowledge of,—that, bating some flagrant instances, —whenever we venture to pronounce upon it, our decisions are little more than random guesses.—For who can search the heart of man?—it is treacherous even to ourselves, and much more likely to impose upon others.—Even in laughter (if you will believe Solomon) the heart is sorrowful: —*the mind sits drooping, whilst the countenance is gay*:—and even he, who is the object of envy to those who look no further than the surface of his estate, —may appear at the same time worthy

of compassion to those who know his private recesses.—Besides this, a man's unhappiness is not to be ascertained so much from what is known to have befallen him,—as from his particular turn and cast of mind, and capacity of bearing it.—Poverty, exile, loss of fame or friends, the death of children, the dearest of all pledges of a man's happiness, make not equal impressions upon every temper.—You will see one man undergo, with scarce the expence of a sigh,—what another, in the bitterness of his soul, would go mourning for all his life long:—nay, a hasty word, or an unkind look, to a soft and tender nature, will strike deeper than a sword to the hardened and senseless.—If these reflections hold true with regard to misfortunes,—they are the same with regard to enjoyments:—we are formed differently,—have different tastes and perceptions of things;—by the force of habit, education, or a particular cast of mind,—it happens that neither the use or possession of the same enjoyments and ad-

vantages, produce the same happiness and contentment;—but that it differs in every man almost according to his temper and complexion:—so that the self-same happy accidents in life, which shall give raptures to the choleric or sanguine man, shall be received with indifference by the cold and phlegmatic;—and so oddly perplexed are the accounts of both human happiness and misery in this world,—that trifles, light as air, shall be able to make the hearts of some men sing for joy;—at the same time that others, with real blessings and advantages, without the power of using them, have their hearts heavy and discontented.

Alas! if the principles of contentment are not within us,—the height of station and worldly grandeur will as soon add a cubit to a man's stature as to his happiness.

This will suggest to us how little a way we have gone towards the proof of any man's happiness,—in barely saying,—Lo! this man prospers in the

world,—and this man has riches in possession.

When a man has got much above us, we take it for granted,—that he sees some glorious prospects, and feels some mighty pleasures from his height;—whereas, could we get up to him, it is great odds whether we should find any thing to make us tolerable amends for the pains and trouble of climbing up so high.—Nothing, perhaps, but more dangers and more troubles still;—and such a giddiness of head besides, as to make a wise man wish he was well down again upon the level.—To calculate, therefore, the happiness of mankind by their stations and honours, is the most deceitful of all rules;—great, no doubt, is the happiness which a moderate fortune, and moderate desires, with a consciousness of virtue, will secure a man.—Many are the silent pleasures of the honest peasant, who rises cheerfully to his labour:—look into his dwelling, —where the scene of every man's happiness chiefly lies;—he has the same

domestic endearments,—as much joy and comfort in his children,—and as flattering hopes of their doing well,—to enliven his hours and glad his heart, as you could conceive in the most affluent station.—And I make no doubt, in general, but if the true account of his joys and sufferings were to be balanced with those of his betters,—that the upshot would prove to be little more than this,—that the rich man had the more meat,—but the poor man the better stomach;—the one had more luxury,—more able physicians to attend and set him to rights;—the other, more health and soundness in his bones, and less occasion for their help;—that, after these two articles betwixt them were balanced,—in all other things they stood upon a level:—that the sun shines as warm,—the air blows as fresh, and the earth breathes as fragrant, upon the one as the other;—and that they have an equal share in all the beauties and real benefits of nature.—These hints may be sufficient to shew what I proposed from them,—the difficulties

which attend us in judging truly either of the happiness or the misery of the bulk of mankind,—the evidence being still more defective in this case (as the matter of fact is hard to come at)—than even in that of judging of their true characters; of both which, in general, we have such imperfect knowledge, as will teach us candour in our determinations upon each other.

But the main purport of this discourse, is, to teach us humility in our reasonings upon the ways of the Almighty.

That things are dealt unequally in this world, is one of the strongest natural arguments for a future state,—and therefore is not to be overthrown: nevertheless,—I am persuaded the charge is far from being as great as at first sight it may appear;—or if it is,—that our views of things are so narrow and confined, that it is not in our power to make it good.

But suppose it otherwise,—that the happiness and prosperity of bad men

were as great as our general complaints make them,—and, what is not the case,—that we were not able to clear up the matter, or answer it reconcileably with God's justice and providence,—what shall we infer?—Why, the most becoming conclusion is,——that it is one instance more, out of many others, of our ignorance:—why should this, or any other religious difficulty he cannot comprehend,—why should it alarm him more than ten thousand other difficulties which every day elude his most exact and attentive search?—Does not the meanest flower in the field, or the smallest blade of grass, baffle the understanding of the most penetrating mind?—Can the deepest inquiries after nature tell us, upon what particular size and motion of parts the various colours and tastes of vegetables depend;—why one shrub is laxative,—another restraining;—why arsenic or hellebore should lay waste this noble frame of ours,—or opium lock up all the inroads to our senses, and plunder us, in so merciless a manner, of reason

and understanding?—Nay, have not the most obvious things, that come in our way, dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into; and do not the clearest and most exalted understandings find themselves puzzled, and at a loss, in every particle of matter?

Go then,—proud man!—and when thy head turns giddy with opinions of thy own wisdom, that thou wouldst correct the measures of the Almighty,—go then,—take a full view of thyself in this glass;—consider thy own faculties, how narrow and imperfect;—how much they are checquered with truth and falsehood;—how little arrives at thy knowledge, and how darkly and confusedly thou discernest even that little as in a glass:—consider the beginnings and endings of things, the greatest and the smallest, how they all conspire to baffle thee;—and which way ever thou prosecutest thy enquiries,—what fresh subjects of amazement,—and what fresh reasons to believe there are more yet behind which thou canst never compre-

hend.—Consider,—these are but part of his ways;—how little a portion is heard of him?—Canst thou, by searching, find out God?—wouldst thou know the Almighty to perfection?—'Tis as high as heaven, What canst thou do?—'tis deeper than hell, how canst thou know it?

Could we but see the mysterious workings of Providence, and were we able to comprehend the whole plan of his infinite wisdom and goodness, which possibly may be the case in the final consummation of all things;—those events, which we are now so perplexed to account for, would probably exalt and magnify his wisdom, and make us cry out with the Apostle, in that rapturous exclamation,—O! the depth of the riches both of the goodness and wisdom of God!—how unsearchable are his ways, and his paths past finding out!

Now to God, &c.

S E R M O N XLV.

The Ingratitude of Israel.

2 KINGS XVII. 7.

For so it was,—that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.—

THE words of the text account for the cause of a sad calamity, which is related, in the foregoing verses, to have befallen a great number of Israelites, who were surpris'd, in the capital city of Samaria, by Hosea king of Affyria, and cruelly carried away by him out of their own country, and placed on the desolate frontiers of Halah, and in Haber, by the river Gozan, and in the city of the Medes, and there confined to end their days in sorrow and captivity.—Upon which the sacred historian, instead of accounting for so sad an event

merely from political springs and causes; such, for instance, as the superior strength and policy of the enemy, or an unreasonable provocation given,—or that proper measures of defence were neglected;—he traces it up, in one word, to its true cause:—For so it was, says he, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.—It was surely a sufficient foundation to dread some evil,—that they had sinned against that Being who had an unquestionable right to their obedience.—But what an aggravation was it—that they had not only sinned simply against the truth, but against the God of mercies,—who had brought them forth out of the land of Egypt;—who not only created, upheld, and favoured them with so many advantages in common with the rest of their fellow-creatures,—but who had been particularly kind to them in their misfortunes;—who, when they were in the house of bondage, in the most hopeless condition, without a pro-

spect of any natural means of redress, had compassionately heard their cry, and took pity upon the afflictions of a distressed people,—and, by a chain of miracles, delivered them from servitude and oppression:—miracles of so stupendous a nature, that I take delight to offer them, as often as I have an opportunity, to your devoutest contemplations.—This, you would think as high and as complicated an aggravation of their sins as could be urged.—This was not all;—for besides GOD's goodness in first favouring their miraculous escape, a series of successes, not to be accounted for from second causes, and the natural course of events, had crowned their heads in so remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of his general concern for their welfare, but of his particular providence and attachment to them above all people upon earth.—In the wilderness he led them like sheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye:—he suffered no man to do them wrong, but reproved even kings

for their sake.—When they entered into the promised land,—no force was able to stand before them;—when in possession of it,—no army was able to drive them out;—and, in a word, nature, for a time, was driven backwards to serve them; and even the Sun itself had stood still in the midst of heaven to secure their victories.

A people with so many testimonies of God's favour, who had not profited thereby, so as to become a virtuous people, must have been utterly corrupt;—and so they were.—And it is likely, from the many specimens they had given, in Moses's time, of a disposition to forget God's benefits, and upon every trial to rebel against him,—he foresaw they would certainly prove a thankless and unthinking people; extremely inclined to go astray and do evil;—and therefore, if any thing was likely to bring them back to themselves, and to consider the evils of their misdoings,——it must be the dread of some temporal calamity, which, he prophetically

threatened, would one day or other befall them:—hoping, no doubt,—that if no principle of gratitude could make them an obedient people,—at least they might be wrought upon by the terror of being reduced back again by the same all-powerful hand to their first distressed condition;—which, in the end, did actually overtake them.—For, at length, when neither the alternatives of promises or threatenings,—when neither rewards or corrections,—comforts or afflictions, could soften them;—when continual instructions,—warnings,—invitations,—reproofs,—miracles,—prophets and holy guides, had no effect, but, instead of making them grow better, apparently made them grow worse,—God's patience at length withdrew,—and he suffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting them fall into the state of bondage from whence he had first raised them;—and that not only in that partial instance of those in Samaria, who were taken by Hosea,—but, I mean, in that more general instance of

their overthrow by the army of the Chaldeans;—wherein he suffered the whole nation to be led away, and carried captive into Nineveh and Babylon.—We may be assured, that the history of God Almighty's just dealings with this froward and thoughtless people—was not wrote for nothing;—but that it was given as a loud call and warning of obedience and gratitude, for all races of men to whom the light of revelation should hereafter reach;—and therefore I have made choice of this subject, as it seems likely to furnish some reflections seasonable for the beginning of this week,—which should be devoted to such meditations as may prepare and fit us for the solemn fast which we are shortly to observe; and whose pious intention will not be answered by a bare assembling ourselves together, without making some religious and national remarks suitable to the occasion.—Doubtless, there is no nation which ever had so many extraordinary reasons and supernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous, as the

Jews had;—which, besides the daily blessings of God's providence to them, has not received sufficient blessings and mercies at the hands of God, so as to engage their best services, and the warmest returns of gratitude they can pay.

There has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from some grievous calamity,—from the rage of pestilence or famine—from the edge and fury of the sword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them:—they may have been preserved by providential discoveries of plots and designs against the well-being of their states, or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour, when beginning to sink.—By some signal interposition of God's providence, they may have rescued their liberties, and all that was dear to them, from the jaws of some tyrant;—or may have preserved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts failed them.—If other countries have reason to be thankful to God for any one of these mercies,—much more has this of ours,—which, at one time or

other, has received them all;—inso-
much that our history, for this last hun-
dred years, has scarce been any thing
but the history of our deliverances and
God's blessings;—and these in so com-
plicated a chain, such as were scarce
ever vouchsafed to any people besides,
except the Jews;—and with regard to
them, though inferior in the stupendous
manner, of their working,—yet no way
so—in the extensive goodness of their
effects, and the infinite benevolence and
power which must have wrought them
for us.

Here then let us stop to look back a
moment, and inquire what great effects
all this has had upon our sins, and how
far worthy we have lived of what we have
received.

A stranger, when he heard that this
island had been so favoured by heaven,
—so happy in our laws and religion,—
so flourishing in our trade,—and so bless-
ed in our situation,—and so visibly pro-
tected in all of them by providence,
——would conclude, that our morals
had kept pace with these blessings, and

would expect that, as we were the most favoured by God Almighty, we must be the most virtuous and religious people upon earth.

Would to God, there was any other reason to incline one to such a belief!—would to God, that the appearance of religion was more frequent! for that would necessarily imply the reality of it somewhere, and most probably in the greatest and most respectable characters of the nation.—Such was the situation of this country, till a licentious king introduced a licentious age.—The court of Charles the Second first brake in upon; and, I fear, has almost demolished the out-works of religion, of modesty, and of sober manners—so that, instead of any real marks of religion amongst us, you see thousands who are tired with carrying the mask of it,—and have thrown it aside as a useless incumbrance.

But this licentiousness, he'll say, may be chiefly owing to a long course of prosperity, which is apt to corrupt men's minds.—God has since tried you with afflictions; — you have had lately a

bloody and expensive war;—God has sent, moreover, a pestilence amongst your cattle, which has cut off the stock from the fold, and left no herd in the stalls:—besides,—you have just felt two dreadful shocks in your metropolis of a most terrifying nature;—which, if God's providence had not checked and restrained within some bounds, might have overthrown your capital, and your kingdom with it.

Surely, he'll say,—all these warnings must have awakened the consciences of the most unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your land, from such admonitions, to have learned righteousness,—I own, this is the natural effect,—and, one should hope, should always be the improvement from such calamities;—for we often find, that numbers of people, who in their prosperity seemed to forget God—do yet remember him in the days of trouble and distress;—yet, consider this nationally,—we see no such effect from it, as, in fact, one would expect from speculation.

For instance, with all the devastation and bloodshed which the war has occasioned,—how many converts has it made either to virtue or frugality?—The pestilence amongst our cattle, though it has distressed, and utterly undone, so many thousands; yet what one visible alteration has it made in the course of our lives?

And though, one would imagine, that the necessary drains of taxes for the one, and the loss of rent and property from the other,—should, in some measure, have withdrawn the means of gratifying our passions as we have done;—yet what appearance is there amongst us that it is so;—what one fashionable folly or extravagance has been checked?—Are not the same expences of equipage, and furniture, and dress,—the same order of diversions, perpetually returning, and as great luxury and epicurism of entertainments, as in the most prosperous condition?—So that, though the head is sick, and the whole heart is faint, we all affect to look well in the face, either as if nothing had happened, or we were

ashamed to acknowledge the force and natural effects of the chastisements of God.—And if, from the effects which war and pestilence have had,—we may form a judgment of the moral effects which this last terror is likely to produce,—it is to be feared, however we might be startled at first,—that the impressions will scarce last longer than the instantaneous shock which occasioned them:—And I make no doubt,—should a man have courage to declare his opinion,—“ That he believed it was an indication of God’s anger upon a corrupt generation,”—that it would be great odds but he would be pitied for his weakness, or openly laughed at for his superstition.—Or if, after such a declaration,—he was thought worth setting right in his mistakes,—he would be informed,—that religion had nothing to do in explications of this kind;—that all such violent vibrations of the earth were owing to subterraneous caverns falling down of themselves, or being blown up by nitrous and sulphureous vapours rarified by heat;—and that it was idle

to bring in the Deity to untie the knot, when it can be resolved easily into natural causes.—Vain unthinking mortals! —As if natural causes were any thing else in the hands of God,—but instruments which he can turn to work the purposes of his will, either to reward or punish, as seems fitting to his infinite wisdom.

Thus no man repenteth him of his wickedness, saying,—What have I done? —but every one turneth to his course, as a horse rusheth into the battle.—To conclude, however we may under-rate it now,—it is a maxim of eternal truth, —which both reasonings and all accounts from history confirm,—that the wickedness and corruption of a people will sooner or later always bring on temporal mischiefs and calamities.—And can it be otherwise?—for a vicious nation not only carries the seeds of destruction within, from the natural workings and course of things,—but it lays itself open to the whole force and injury of accidents from without;—and I do venture to say,—there never was a

nation or people fallen into troubles or decay,—but one might justly leave the same remark upon them which the sacred historian makes in the text upon the misfortunes of the Israelites,—for so it was,—that they had sinned against the Lord their God.

Let us, therefore, constantly bear in mind that conclusion of the sacred writer,—which I shall give you in his own beautiful and awful language :

“ But the Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, with great power and a stretch'd-out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship,—and to him shall ye do sacrifice :—And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the commandments he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore.—The Lord your God ye shall fear,—and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.”

Now to God the Father, &c.

END OF THE EIGHTH VOLUME.

